3 2001
$7.00
$8.50 Canada

CZESLAW MILOSZ
To Begin Where I Am

STACKS-MAGAZINES
JUL 31

Partisan Review

REVIEWS
ugene Goodheart
Margery Sabin
Peter W. Wood
Walter Laqueur
Jerrold Hickey

FICTION
Amos Oz
Emil Draitser

POETRY
Horace
(tr. David Ferry)
Tom Disch
Dan Chiasson
Michal Govrin
(tr. Peter Cole)

THE GALLERIES
Karen Wilkin

JOHN PATRICK DIGGINS
Religion and the Founders

LAWRENCE L. LANGER
Pursuit of Death in Holocaust Narrative

YFAAT WEISS
German Discourse in Israel

CUSHING STROUT
William James and the Role of Public Philosophers

CLIFFORD J. MARKS
Daniel Deronda: A Spiritual Journey

EDITH KURZWEIL
On Scholars and Therapists

STACKS-MAGAZINES
12>
4851 64907 7
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

New Paperbacks from Chicago

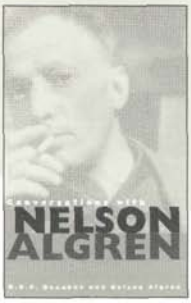
Partisans

Marriage, Politics, and Betrayal Among the New York Intellectuals

David Laskin

"Expertly threading his way among the biographers, Laskin . . . charts the intersections of these high-octane lives. . . . Their histories are neither typical nor prescriptive, but they do beautifully define a moment, if not a future."—Stacy Schiff, *New York Times Book Review*

Paper $16.00



Conversations with Nelson Algren

H. E. F. Donohue and Nelson Algren

"[Algren] is allowed to . . . express his hopes, desires, joys, disappointments and, above all, his serious thoughts on the condition of the human race. Many . . . will be entertained, informed, and electrified by the strength of his voice."
—*Library Journal*

Paper $15.00

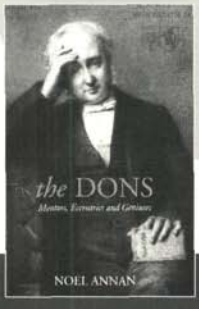
Mishima

A Vision of the Void

Marguerite Yourcenar
Translated by Alberto Manguel

"[A] brilliant book, that of a rare and poetically articulate creative spirit."—*New Statesman*

Paper $14.00



The Dons

Mentors, Eccentrics and Geniuses

Noel Annan

"A witty, erudite, insider account—exactly what one would expect from the best of [the] type."
—Andrew Lycett, *Sunday Times*

Paper $15.00

Available in bookstores.

The University of Chicago Press

www.press.uchicago.edu

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Sixty Years of Great Fiction from Partisan Review

"Have there been ten quarterlies in the literary history of the West that have meant as much to the readers of their time as Partisan Review? *I would guess not."* —Norman Mailer

THIS ANTHOLOGY showcases the work of many of the great writers of this century and shows the significant role *Partisan Review* has played in the development of our literary culture.

Individual and examination copies available from Partisan Review Press, 236 Bay State Road, Boston, MA 02215. Tel. 617/353-4260.

Walter Abish	James T. Farrell	Alberto Moravia	Susan Sontag
James Baldwin	William Faulkner	Amos Oz	Jean Stafford
Samuel Beckett	Franz Kafka	Cynthia Ozick	Gertrude Stein
Saul Bellow	Doris Lessing	Katherine Anne Porter	William Styron
Italo Calvino	Bernard Malamud	Isaac Rosenfeld	Tatyana Tolstaya
Albert Camus	André Malraux	Philip Roth	Michel Tournier
Eleanor Clark	Norman Manea	Delmore Schwartz	Lionel Trilling
John Dos Passos	Mary McCarthy	Ignazio Silone	Robert Penn Warren
Ralph Ellison	Daphne Merkin	Isaac Bashevis Singer	

Paper: $14.95 0-9644377-4-0. Cloth: $24.95 0-9644377-5-9
Distributed by Independent Publishers Group. 1-800-888-4741

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Five Points

A JOURNAL OF LITERATURE & ART

poetry ❧ fiction ❧ essays ❧ interviews ❧ photograpy ❧ art

"Already a literary force! No magazine in America is publishing better writing than Five Points."

—Richard Bausch

"Five Points *is one of the very few literary magazines I read from cover to cover."*

—Stuart Dybek

"A refreshing combination of the old and the new. The best literary magazine I've read in ages."

—Philip Levine

Best American Poetry ❧ Best American Fiction ❧ Puschcart Prize

One year—$20 Two years—$30 Single issues—$7

Five Points
Georgia State University
University Plaza
Atlanta, GA 30303-3083

Visit us at: http://www.webdelsol.com/Five_Points

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Partisan Review

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
William Phillips

EDITOR
Edith Kurzweil

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
Steven Marcus

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS
Stanislaw Baranczak
Morris Dickstein
Jeffrey Herf
Don Share
Rosanna Warren
Jacob Weisberg

CORRESPONDING EDITORS
Leslie Epstein
Eugene Goodheart
Roger Shattuck

CONSULTANTS
John Ashbery
Frank Kermode
Barbara Rose

PUBLICATIONS AND ADVISORY BOARD
Joanna S. Rose, Chairman
Cynthia G. Colin
Judith Ramsey Ehrlich
Stephen Feinberg
Richard Grimm
Frederick J. Iseman
Marjorie Iseman
Nina Joukowsky Köprülü
Mary Kaplan
Vera List
David B. Pearce, M.D.
Joan C. Schwartz
Tama Starr
Dorothea Straus
Jon Westling
Peter Wood
Edwin M. Zimmerman

FUNDING PROVIDED IN PART BY
MASSACHUSETTS CULTURAL COUNCIL

PARTISAN REVIEW, published quarterly in Winter, Spring, Summer, and Fall by PARTISAN REVIEW, Inc., is at Boston University, 236 Bay State Road, Boston, MA 02215. Phone: 617/353-4260. Fax: 617/353-7444. Website: www.partisanreview.org. E-mail: partisan@bu.edu. Subscriptions $25.00 a year, $44.00 for two years, $63.00 for three years; foreign subscriptions, including Canada, $31.00 a year, $50.00 for two years; institutions, $36.00 a year. For subscription inquiries, telephone 617/353-4106. All payments from foreign countries must be made by U.S. money order or checks drawn on U.S. account. Prepaid single issue $7.00. Add $1.50 for postage and handling. US ISSN 0031-2525. Copyright © 2001 by PARTISAN REVIEW, Inc. Periodicals postage paid at Boston, Massachusetts and additional entries. Postmaster: Send address changes to 236 Bay State Road, Boston, MA 02215. Distributed in the U.S.A. by Eastern News Distributors, Inc., 2020 Superior Street, Sandusky, OH 44870. Phone: 800/221-3148. Available in microfilm from University Microfilms International, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. Indexed by the American Humanities Index. Send manuscripts (originals or clear photocopies only) to 236 Bay State Road, Boston, MA 02215. No manuscripts will be returned nor queries answered unless accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelopes. No responsibility is assumed for their loss or injury.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

PR
SUMMER 2001
Volume LXVIII, Number 3

. . . . . .

CONTENTS

CONTRIBUTORS 358

ARTICLES

CZESLAW MILOSZ From *To Begin Where I Am*: A Semi-Private Letter about Poetry 359

JOHN PATRICK DIGGINS Religion and the Founders 371

LAWRENCE L. LANGER Pursuit of Death in Holocaust Narrative 379

YFAAT WEISS German Discourse in Israel 396

CUSHING STROUT William James and Public Philosophers 432

CLIFFORD J. MARKS Reading *Daniel Deronda* 446

EDITH KURZWEIL On Scholars and Therapists 477

FICTION

AMOS OZ From *The Same Sea* 405

EMIL DRAITSER Faithful Masha 416

FEATURES

KAREN WILKIN At the Galleries 464

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Poetry 425

Horace (tr. David Ferry)
Tom Disch
Dan Chiasson
Michal Govrin (tr. Peter Cole)

Books

EUGENE GOODHEART Double Vision 483
From Dawn to Decadence
by Jaques Barzun

MARGERY SABIN Secular Midrash 488
A Critic's Journey
by Geoffrey Hartman

PETER W. WOOD Surplus Intelligence? 495
The Passionate Mind
by Robin Fox

WALTER LAQUEUR Fundamentalism 499
Enemy in the Mirror
by Roxanne L. Euben
Jihad. Expansion et déclin de l'islamisme
by Gilles Kepel
Legacy of the Prophet
by Anthony Shadid

JERROLD HICKEY Dawn Powell as Correspondent 503
Selected Letters of Dawn Powell
by Tim Page

Letters to the Editor 509

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Contributors

CZESLAW MILOSZ, the winner of the Nobel and other prizes, is Emeritus Professor in Slavic Languages and Literatures at the University of California, Berkeley. . . .**MADELINE G. LEVINE** translated three previous books by Czeslaw Milosz, including *Milosz's ABC's* . . . .**JOHN PATRICK DIGGINS** is the author of the forthcoming *Desire Under Democracy: A Study of Eugene O'Neill*. . . .Professor of English, Emeritus at Simmons College, **LAWRENCE L. LANGER** is the author of *In a Different Light: Genesis in the Art of Samuel Bak* (2001). . . .**YFAAT WEISS**'s *Citizenship in Israel and in Germany: Concepts of Ethnic Background* will be published by Berghahn. . . . **CUSHING STROUT** is Ernest I. White Professor of American Studies and Human Letters, Emeritus, Cornell University. . . .**CLIFFORD J. MARKS** teaches English at the University of Wyoming. . . .**KAREN WILKIN**'s exhibition catalogue *Clement Greenberg: A Critic's Collection*, for the Portland Art Museum, will be published this summer by Princeton University Press. . . .**EDITH KURZWEIL**, Professor Emeritus, Adelphi University, is the editor of *Partisan Review*. . . . **AMOS OZ**'s *The Same Sea* is forthcoming from Harcourt. . . .**EMIL DRAITSER** teaches Russian at Hunter College and is at work on his ninth book *Shush! Growing Up in Odessa*. . . .**SYLVIA MAIZELL** is a member of the American Literary Translators Association and of the New York Circle of Translators. . . .**HORACE**'s poems were translated from the Latin by **DAVID FERRY**, whose most recent book, *Of No Country I Know: New and Selected Poems* was published by the University of Chicago Press (1999). . . .**TOM DISCH**'s new selection of Byron's poetry is forthcoming from Modern Library. . . .**MICHAL GOVRIN** is author of *The Name*, as well as *Body and Prayer*, with Jacques Derrida and David Shapiro. . . . **PETER COLE**'s *Selected Poems of Shmuel Hanagrid* received the 1998 MLA prize for translation. . . .**DAN CHIASSON** teaches writing at Harvard. . . .**EUGENE GOODHEART** is the author of ten books, including a memoir, *Confessions of a Secular Jew* (Overlook Press). . . .**MARGERY SABIN** is Lorraine Chiu Wang Professor of English at Wellesley College. . . .**PETER W. WOOD** is Associate Provost and Associate Professor of Anthropology at Boston University. . . . **WALTER LAQUEUR** is the author, most recently, of *Generation Exodus*. . . .Former editor and publisher of *Boston Magazine*, **JERROLD HICKEY** is currently the editor of *Bostonia*.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CZESLAW MILOSZ

From *To Begin Where I Am*

A Semi-Private Letter about Poetry

EVERY AUTHOR SHOULD BE SENSITIVE to criticism, should ponder it for a long time and draw conclusions from it. This statement is not as obvious as it might seem. There have been periods in the history of literature when a dismissive attitude toward criticism was part of the writer's toolbox and progress was made despite it. Critics are sometimes more susceptible to stylish and purely transitory slogans than the authors they discuss, and flogging their "isms," they construct a ponderous machine which is slow to move forward. Finally, young writers, if they are too responsive to criticism, lose more than they gain, because their vision, strongly felt, but imperfectly conceived, draws down upon them thunderbolts, which they may easily attribute to the vision itself, rather than to its flawed execution.

Despite all these permutations, at this particular moment there are, in my opinion, special conditions which demand that critics and authors assume equal responsibility for establishing the voice of Polish literature. There's no helping it; a heavy block of iron cannot be lifted singlehandedly. Therefore, we must observe with some alarm the absence of literary criticism in Poland and the gray space that book and theater reviews occupy in the weekly papers. And this is occurring at a time when, as I have said, the conditions are right for authors and critics to take each other seriously.

I was moved to write this letter by the serious and flattering review of my book of poems *Ocalenie* (Rescue) published in the May [1946]

Editor's Note: Excerpted from *To Begin Where I Am: Selected Essays* by Czeslaw Milosz edited and with an introduction by Bogdana Carpenter and Madeline G. Levine. To be published in October by Farrar, Straus and Giroux, LLC.

Copyright © 2001 by Czeslaw Milosz. Translation and Introduction copyright © 2001 by Farrar, Straus and Giroux, LLC. All rights reserved.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

issue of *Twórczość* (Creative Writing), and written by Kazimierz Wyka, one of Poland's few literary critics. This issue reached me in New York after a two-month delay, which explains my belated response. The questions it raises are of continuing and immediate concern, however.

1. *Is journalistic poetry possible?*

I pose this question while recalling the unpleasant shudders that poetic journalism elicits in people of good taste. I also know that this question has often been answered with a yes, citing Whitman and Heine, and often with a no, citing good poets who destroyed their talent by harnessing it to the service of problems pronounced upon *expressis verbis*. Every question, however, acquires a slightly different sound amid new experiences and circumstances, and new people repeat old—but only apparently old—words.

I used to be an opponent of any journalistic concerns in poetry, and I was not unique in that regard. The frequent attempts at vociferous, unmediated protest (and there were plenty of reasons for that) left a feeling of bitterness, shame, and betrayal with regard to the rules of good craftsmanship. How did it happen, then, that poems filled with invective and employing the stylistic methods of pamphlet writing, of persiflage, and even of a philosophical treatise wound up in *Ocalenie*? And how did it come to pass that, despite what Wyka has to say, I do not consider them merely "rhymed documentation of reality" or a departure from my true path?

Two explanations are possible: either the author, having written those poems, grew attached to them thanks to the particular events surrounding their creation (which often happens) and is evaluating them subjectively, or the sensitive, wise critic possesses a range of sensibility which does not register certain combinations and instead of music hears rasping sounds, whistles, and inarticulate noise. Both explanations are possible and either person may be right, but the question of two different evaluations, two different types of argumentation in relation to one and the same work, still remains—as, for example, in judging the cycle "Voices of Poor People."

Let us start right in. The main problem with contemporary poetry is what someone has called *peu de réalité*, a detachment from reality caused by remaining inside the chalk circle of rigidly defined ways of reacting to the world. This should not be confused with "living in an ivory tower," "art for art's sake," or the like, because the problem is in fact a technical one. The poet, heir to the heritage of recent European poetry, finds himself, like the contemporary painter, obligated to employ

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

laconicisms, abbreviations, and concern for new discoveries in presenting the proportions of observed material. To put it metaphorically: if the description of a blade of grass has become problematic, is there room left for a panorama including people, animals, the rising and the setting of the sun? This condition, however, feels like an unbearable constriction of the terrain of poetry, and efforts at escaping from the chalk circle are a fundamental feature of the period in which we are now living.

It's the same in painting, with all due respect for the differences between these two branches of art. Picasso's exhibition in London, which allowed us to become acquainted with the work he did during the war, can serve as an example. We can admire this wartime Picasso who remains distant from classicism, who still operates with the most blatant deformation, or we can criticize him in the name of social and aesthetic puritanism, which does not permit placing a platter of herring on a woman's head instead of a hat. Still, we must take into consideration the intensity of the passion that speaks to us from those canvases. Irony, disgust, mockery, rage are too clearly present, their intention of screaming out a cry of protest through form and color is too evident for us not to notice. This is an effort to expand the possibilities of the painter's tongue, to sing a new Sophoclean tragedy in the language of Hottentots.

Last winter I spent a great deal of time in Feliks Topolski's London studio. Looking at his albums of drawings, "Great Britain in War" and "Russia in War," and also at his canvases in which masses of people of all races cluster together, propelled by the rhythm of the events that visited five continents, I thought that painting's road back to emotions and human passions is profoundly justified and that artists again have before them the prospect of hope, which had apparently vanished.

Let us not deceive ourselves. This is a period of temptations. Plenty of fluent, patriotic, ideological poems whose words ring out, whisper, and stupefy are bound to appear. No doubt there are already painters who, citing murky conversations about realism, are prepared to remind us, to represent, to immortalize. Let us leave those whitewashed graves of theirs to their proper fate. A true resolution of this issue will take place among people who understand that more than poetry's enrichment with assonance separates us from Romanticism and that one can no longer paint as if Cézanne had never existed.

Some revolutions, despite their use of slogans aimed against the past, are truer to the past than might be imagined, considering the way they swear that they are beginning anew. The so-called poetic avant-garde has created out of the poet a creature with a head covered with mathematical lumps, with exceptionally large lenses for its eyes, and suffering

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

from atrophy of the heart and liver. Such poetry depends on noting down intellectual impressions visual ones above all; intellect fulfills the role of an engineer of impressions so that the object of its interests is more the poetic work itself than the wide world. The godparents of this method are the theoreticians of pure poetry who, like Edgar Allan Poe, argued that poetry should not venture into the realm of passion or the field of virtue. Perhaps in a stormier era such poetry has a better chance of surviving, since a certain degree of insensitivity helps one keep one's calm and balance. It is free to legitimize itself against its attackers by citing the positive pedagogical influence it exerts in shaping the sense of rational construction. However, the aggrieved heart and liver, along with the aggrieved mind, which reluctantly agrees to perform only mathematical functions, demand their rights, and that safe "alcove for rent" becomes cramped.

When, after many years of disrupted contact with French poetry, the first books (by Eluard and Aragon) fell into my hands, I felt both satisfaction and embarrassment. I was satisfied because they fulfilled my prediction about the expanding range of topics. My embarrassment was the embarrassment of a Pole: Damn it, we could have written just like that during the war. But it never entered our mind. We were ashamed: they were throwing themselves into patriotic themes with a degree of enthusiasm that we could not match. In situations like these we quote our great poets: Mickiewicz, Slowacki, Krasiński, Norwid. We have a tradition of suffering. But they are not terrified by the shade of Victor Hugo, and like neophytes, they are rapacious.

I think that Aragon's poetry is overrated in Poland. The thrashings he receives in France, precisely for what makes us uncomfortable, are often well deserved. Despite this, his experiments with applying the ballad style to France's struggles and hopes is as interesting (*toute proportion gardée*) as Picasso's furious drive to depict the world as monstrous or the transformations of Eluard, whom one would hardly have predicted would become a poet of underground France.

The process is taking a different turn in the Anglo-Saxon countries. But if we consider just the works of T. S. Eliot and W. H. Auden, we will find in their poems microdramas, satires, philosophical treatises, and comedies in the style of Aristophanes. Right now, a book by the fine young American poet Karl Shapiro, his *Essay on Rime*, is lying before me. It is a treatise on poetry in verse. I don't want to underestimate this drilling of new tunnels by poetry, its turning back to before the nineteenth century in search of forms of expression which are by now so

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

entrenched and stable that they compel the contemporary artist to utter freshness and sensitivity.

What is this disdained journalistic writing? The journalistic writer is a person who fights with his pen against something or someone. We know at least several thousand good literary works which were written against someone, and perhaps that, in fact, is the reason why they are good and have endured. Even Dante derived great pleasure from placing his enemies in Hell. A journalistic element is present in virtually every literary work to a greater or lesser degree, and only the writer who has developed to perfection the disappearance of heart and liver in himself can get rid of it completely.

Perhaps then, in condemning journalistic elements in literature we have in mind particular variants, those which are closest to us, cultivated over the course of, shall we say, the last hundred years? We feel that the new artistic means, which arose in the laboratories of the adherents of pure art, are in conflict with the flood of words flowing freely in the works of the Romantics.

Poetic language has become as pictorial as the language of primitive peoples, and how to introduce concepts into it without depriving it of its conciseness is a real puzzle. It is easy for me to agree with the condemnation of journalistic writing in the name of such reasoning. But why should we not admit that we are using the word "journalism" in too narrow a sense? There are significant differences between the journalistic *Dismissal of the Greek Envoys* by the late sixteenth-century poet Jan Kochanowski and a Romantic tirade. No one is telling us to hew to the latter as a model. Rather, we should deplore the fact that in Poland whenever someone wants to speak about the so-called great themes, he falls into the Romantic manner, which is supposed to be a matter of faithfulness to tradition, but to a tradition broken off well over a century ago.

I think that the key to the future should be found in considerations of artistic irony, persiflage, the dramatic forms of poetry. If I am going to be met with the rebuke that I am calling for mockery and a light tone, then there's really no reason to continue speaking. Artistic irony, as I understand it, rests first of all on the author's ability to inhabit the skin of various people and, when he writes in the first person, to speak as if not he were speaking but a persona created by him. The essential meaning of a work is thus encapsulated in the author's relation to the persona. This relationship may vary from cautious approbation to heart-felt negation and on to venomous negation—thousands of variations are possible; what is attacked directly eludes us and can often be

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

caught in this way. This is an old recipe from fine masters, but it seems to have been almost entirely forgotten. The pure Romantic manner dismisses it: the speaker and the author are one and the same. Byron felt obligated to announce what he thought of his heroes, inserting entire digressions of personal lyrical flights, not distancing himself from himself for even a moment. Only when the Romantics aspired to drama did they have to make allowances for the rules, without which drama is impossible.

I have my own view of Mickiewicz's *Ballads and Romances* and his *Crimean Sonnets*. I think I have a right to. Every Pole has his private accounting with Mickiewicz, just as an Englishman has his private accounting with the Bible. I do not consider the *Ballads and Romances* to be as Romantic a work as, say, the verse of Lamartine. If I read *Ballads and Romances* as they are read in school, I would have to come to the conclusion that the author of "A City Winter" is at the very least infantile, and I would not be able to explain their position in his work as a whole. I love them for all the shades of the distance Mickiewicz kept from the songs and fables of the Nowogródek region, a distance filled with tender affirmation; I love them for his incarnations in the figures of hunters and maidens, for his skill at erasing the many difficulties he faced, and for his use of simple language. It is a work of artistic irony (not irony in the colloquial sense), and when one looks at it in this way, it is easier to understand how he came to write *Pan Tadeusz*. Sometimes I recite "Tukaj" to myself and think about what it is that produces the exquisite beauty of Tukaj's speech before his death. Is it not that it is persiflage?

The *Crimean Sonnets* are, in my opinion, less a collection of lyrical effusions and more a song sung by a solo bass voice, where the performer is not at all identical with the total Mickiewicz, if I may put it that way. Like Kochanowski's *Laments*, they are *extemporale* on the theme of death, with a conscious selection of patterns which exist in literature, so that in the *Sonnets* the speaker is deliberately posed to resemble a portrait by Wánkowicz. Only this gives them their transparency and their unity of themes, makes them, in a word, classical poems, despite the attacks launched by pseudoclassicists.

As long as the poetic *métier* is reduced, as it is today, to assembling words and overlooks the subtleties of the author's relationship to what he supposedly is saying "from the depths of his soul," it will be difficult to believe in the possibility of escaping from the chalk circle, and those who do not like a journalistic tone will be absolutely right. Poetry is divided into pure lyric and pure satire and obviously it cannot be

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tempted to touch upon human matters which are not amenable to either lyric or satiric treatment (and it appears that there are quite a few of those). So I prefer Krasicki's *Myszeis* (The Mouse-iad), in which the phrase "Sacred love of our beloved fatherland" appears on the occasion of a war among mice.

Mixing together lyric and satire—a dose of lyric and a dose of satire (romantic irony)—will not resolve anything either. If Polish critics and poets treated their obligations seriously, they would convene a major conference dedicated to the classical education of youth, because only a good classical program could lend truth to Norwid's pronouncement that "Neither a shield nor a sword, but a masterpiece, is the people's weapon." One should not trust today's pedagogical positivists. From the point of view of literature, they are romantic arsonists. In their hearts they are convinced that civilization dates from the nineteenth century, and the rest is utter nonsense.

Given the present state of readers' interests and similar pressures on poets themselves, it would be presumptuous to aim at taking a very large step beyond the chalk circle. Despite this, we must make the attempt, opening ourselves up to rather peculiar interpretations. Today's reader, even a good reader of poetry, is sensitive to the so-called formal values and likes to catch the author by his words, giving his psychoanalytic inclinations free rein. A grasp of the work's entirety, the concept employed by the poet, escapes his notice. If the poet clearly signals by shaking his head and winking, then his poem will ultimately be placed among satirical or comic verse. Approval or satire. Nothing else.

"Objectivization" is a fashionable word nowadays. Are we free to use it without having thoroughly discussed the entire complexity of the author's attitude toward the lines of verse he has written? If it has a Romantic, and not a classical, form, there is no complexity. If there is no complexity, there is no objectivization—that is how I would put it. When Józef Weyssenhoff's novel *The Life and Ideas of Zygmunt Podfilipski* was published in 1898, the critics did not know what to think about the book: was it in praise of Podfilipski or was it a satire on Podfilipski? It may be that Weyssenhoff was simply a good writer and maintained a distance from his character. Let us also recall the arguments over whether the heroes of Mickiewicz's *Pan Tadeusz* are swine or models of civic virtue.

It does not discredit me that, having fine predecessors, I attempted to introduce into poetry on my own modest scale some old, but today revolutionary, principles, and that I met with misunderstanding. I wrote "The World: A Naïve Poem," "Voices of Poor People," and a host of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

other poems in a similar style, after which I was operated upon with the psycho-socioanalytical method ("the poet, whether he means to or not, says that. . . .After all, it is clearly stated"). Here I could introduce numerous examples from a couple of reviews. I will limit myself to one. The poem "Waltz" is very simple: a lady who is dancing the waltz in the year 1910 has, or could have had, a vision of the years of the Second World War. Two epochs: the first, during which that which will destroy the existing order is still developing, and the second, during which the destruction is completed. The tragedy of ignorance of the future. When, toward the end of the poem, I say to her,

> Forget it. Nothing exists but this bright ballroom
> And the waltz, the flowers, the lights, and the echoes

that is my compassionate irony placing a blindfold over her eyes. I feel very sorry for her, because I know how it will end.

In his review, Kazimierz Wyka argues that what I say to her reveals "a quest for autonomy in the name of beauty." That's interesting. Is it because I tell her to keep on dancing the waltz? Undoubtedly, dancing the waltz has more beauty in it than a vision of concentration camps. But if she weren't dancing the waltz in her delightful ignorance, there would be no dramatic conflict, there would be no poem. Was I really obligated to add a commentary with more or less the following content: "Ah, you pathetic creature, just wait, you'll get yours!"? I would never add such a commentary, because it would express at most only a fraction of my feelings toward this person.

Perhaps this is not really a journalistic verse. The real difficulty begins when I happen to sketch certain types or individuals and to speak in their name, as in my cycle "Voices of Poor People." I suspect that when "The Poor Poet" or Adrian Zieliński begin to be treated as my own disguises (not even roles), these poems will appear too simple, even primitive, and that is how I explain why Wyka calls them "journalism," "an eloquent document." I, however, consider them to be among the most complex poems I have ever written, complex, at least, for a period when poets rarely create situations and characters.

Wyka's review has given me so much grist for my mill that I would feel uncomfortable if I did not write frankly about a phenomenon that struck me: namely, the boundary line demarcated by the critics beyond which the forbidden kingdom of journalistic writing begins. I think that this boundary is no more real than the lines demarcating latitudes and longitudes.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

2. *The Arcadian Myth*

The arcadian or cytherean is a very old one. There is no need to seek it only among ancient Greek poets or the writers and painters of the Rococo period. Under whatever name we give to it, it has reappeared for hundreds of generations. It is a dream about the happy life of the human race. Sometimes that happiness is projected back in time to a legendary golden age, as among the ancients. Sometimes, as among Christians, it is postponed until the fulfillment of time and the coming of the Savior, or until the moment of death. Maciej Kazimierz Sarbiewski, our seventeenth-century Latin poet, displays a longing for his "heavenly fatherland," which he penetrates during his lifetime by rising up to the clouds on a winged horse. (No one has written on "The Obsession with Flight in Sarbiewski," about his viewing the earth from above.) In Shakespeare, the golden age is situated in a forest on a midsummer's night, in the woods of Arden. For pseudo-shepherdesses reading *Paul and Virginia*, the land of happiness was America's wilderness. Socialism put off happiness until the future, anticipating its creation by new societies.

Faith in an arcadian myth is by no means a crime. If there were no poets to repeat continuously that humankind ought to live in such a way that it is possible to write, "*Nec suplex turba timebat / Iudicis ora sui, sed erant sine vindice tuti*," we would turn into a species of reptiles.

Kazimierz Wyka sees the sin of aestheticism in poets' attraction to the arcadian myth. I do not think he is right. True, one can cite eras when that aspiration was transposed into a fondness for idylls, into creating a closed, imaginary state of magical spells. His condemnation would appear directed at such aspirations. But even the happiness of primitive peoples in Rousseau contained the dynamism of contrast; it struck a blow at the spoiled society of the eighteenth century. Perhaps, then, it is the "private entertainment" of the great patrons of pure poetry that riles him? Here, too, to take the case of Rimbaud, for instance, it turns out that his personal gamble in the name of happiness was actually a contest for the happiness of the human race. A true arcadian myth, if it is rich enough, goes beyond one's personal state of bliss and is incapable of imagining happiness otherwise than as a universal condition—of the nation or of all people on earth. That is why one has to be careful with the arcadian myth, because it can transform itself into a promethean myth.

I am grateful to Wyka for drawing my attention to the dangers posed by the arcadian element in my poetry. His proof was too weak, however, to convince me. Take the ending of my poem "In Warsaw":

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Was I born to become
a ritual mourner?
I want to sing of festivities,
The greenwood into which Shakespeare
Often took me. Leave
To poets a moment of happiness,
Otherwise, your world will perish.

The critic sees in this "the quest for nonconformity in the name of aesthetic contemplation, in the name of the beauty of reality." I ask him:

1. Does not every inhabitant of Warsaw experience a feeling of protest against the ruins? Isn't the sight of the destroyed capital something that disturbs the inner peace of every inhabitant of Warsaw?

2. Is it not monstrous that virtually every generation of Polish poets must fulfill the function of ritual mourners, and would not a calm acceptance of this situation be the same as sanctioning all our national manias, which always yield the same results?

3. Is the thought of conditions in Poland which would allow poets to be singers of happiness abnormal and immoral?

4. Does the critic not detect the artistic irony in this contradiction: the poet does not want to become a ritual mourner, but he is a ritual mourner?

The poem "Morning" is programmatic according to Wyka. Let us agree, willingly or not, that it is. What does it contain? In the first place, a description of morning in a Polish village during the German occupation. Second, the assertion that song breaks off when people's despair weighs it down. Third, a yearning to keep the song. Fourth, a vision of a happy Poland, which is symbolized by art, by mass art: theater and music. Fifth, a condemnation of complaining. I do not know where there is any dream of happy islands here. Or perhaps this is it:

In vain do you remember Italian vineyards
The green of England and the oceans' gleams.

Exactly, in vain. If people had been well off during the German occupation, they would not have complained. If they had not complained, they would not have had to be of two minds, to suppress their complaints while comforting themselves with a vision of the more beautiful world of the future. Then such verses would certainly not have come into being.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

People in Poland dreamed during the war: about journeys, about a beautiful future Warsaw, about the taste of freedom, about food and drink. These were very human dreams, and if I gave them expression, creating images of cities where it was permitted to debate openly about the republic (poets of arcadian myths love ancient Greece), or about a marble Warsaw of the future filled with song, sculpture, food and drink, this only demonstrates that I lived in harmony with the population, that I was no different from anyone else.

Sometimes the world loses its face. It becomes too base. The task of the poet is to restore its face, because otherwise man is lost in doubt and despair. It is an indication that the world need not always be like this; it can be different.

Nec suplex turba timebat iudicis ora sui.

Do arcadian elements lead to nonconformity? We need to make some distinctions. There are two types of nonconforming. One is nonconformity to the life of society, a severing of the individual from his ties with the collective, abandonment of the obligations that a particular person owes his society. Given the present trend toward a lively interest in public life after the experiences of the war, there is little probability that this is a threat for writers. Personally, I am appalled by the passion with which I read newspapers (apparently these political passions begin at a certain age).

The other sort of nonconformity, the refusal to share the moral approbation of evil, is every poet's privilege. I know Europe, every month I am getting to know America better, and I see no reason why I should have to accommodate myself and cry out that everything is for the best in the best of all possible worlds. I have too much heart and liver for this. When I wrote in the introduction to *Rescue* that I accepted the salvational goal of poetry, that was exactly what I had in mind, and I still believe that poetry can either save or destroy nations.

In conclusion, I appeal to Kazimierz Wyka. He wrote that I am a loner of an artist. That is true, but it is bad, because it seems to me that I perceive my own road better than my literary abilities allow. In sorrow I assert that at the present moment Polish literature is entering upon a renaissance of Romanticism. Critics on the left, professing to be Humanists, do what they can to urge writers in this direction. They are not Humanists, however, but Romantics masquerading as Humanists, wolves in sheep's clothing, and they are each fixated on the notion that each one of them is Erasmus of Rotterdam.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Kazimierz Wyka! If you and several other people of good faith and sound mind do not put a stop to this, it will be too late. It is no time to be shuffling around inside the chalk circle. The circle is already cracking.

> Will it be a bright butterfly soaring over the earth
> Or a moth, dirty tribe of the night?

It seems it will be a Romantic moth. For Poles, whatever is Romantic is pretty, great, patriotic, national, universal—by its very nature. Just one more moment and they will become entangled in a web of lies, like the émigrés, in a slightly different, leftist-nationalist mode, which, in the final analysis, makes no difference. Kazimierz Wyka, this is the last possible moment.

Translated by Madeline G. Levine

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

JOHN PATRICK DIGGINS

Religion and the Founders

THE CURRENT STATE of American politics, with all its religiosity and its pretense about morality and values, leaves one wondering if anything changes under the sun. It is always hazardous to question belief in progress by citing evidence of moral decline. But consider two episodes in history that are five centuries apart: the ancient reign of Pope Leo X and the modern presidency of William Jefferson Clinton.

On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther posted his famous, or infamous, 95 Theses on the door of the Wittenberg Cathedral. One thesis dealt with his angry objections to the Roman Catholic Church's practice of selling indulgences. Pope Leo X approved of church officials traveling all over Europe carrying sacks of indulgences that, for a price, would grant dispensations to those who desired to eat meat on days of fast, those who sought to marry a relative, those who needed to be told that their deceased loved one would be released from Purgatory by hiring priests to sing masses for the soul of the dead, and those who wanted the penances imposed during confession to be commuted for money. "The rule of the Church," wrote the nineteenth-century Oxford historian James Froude, "was nothing for nothing."

Let us move forward five centuries and shift from Europe to America and from religion to politics. Today campaign donations carry on like the spiritual huckstering that ruined the reputation of the Catholic Church centuries ago. Contributing huge sums of money buys access and influence; no dollars, no dispensations. In the Middle Ages money bought entry into the inner sanctum of the Holy Roman Church. Today money buys access to a sacred place residing at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, perhaps the one shrine in American political history, the hallowed chamber that no true patriot would like to see desecrated—the Lincoln Bedroom. During the nineties the White House became an overnight rental agency through which one could sleep with the ghost of Lincoln for a hefty contribution. With this arrangement, Jesus's dictum needs to be revised: "Blessed are the rich!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It seems, then, that little has changed over five centuries. It is still "nothing for nothing" as money now dominates politics as it once dominated religion. But in the past something did change and changed profoundly. Luther's protests against the Catholic Church's practice of indulgences set the flames that ignited the Protestant Reformation. In recent times, instead of expecting a political reformation, we grew accustomed to watching a President accumulate more political money than ever raised in history and then calmly enter Sunday church with Bible in hand. Redemption has replaced reform.

The Savior who drove the money changers from the Temple and died on the Cross for our sins reentered history by way of the recent American presidential election. Asked to name his favorite philosopher, George W. Bush answered "Christ." Why? "Because he changed my heart." We used to be told that the Lord's instruction to "follow me" meant not to run for office but to lead a Christian way of life of worldly powerlessness and leave politics to the Romans, who preferred successful conquests to the salvation of their souls. That Christianity is silent on how power should be comprehended and employed is a problem even more compounded in Al Gore's religiosity. The professed born-again vice president assured us that whenever he is faced with a difficult decision, he asks himself, "What Would Jesus Do?"

Are these guys serious? Fortunately for the country, our Founding Fathers neither allowed Christ to influence their minds nor stopped to ask Gore's question after the Boston Massacre of 1770, when British Redcoats slaughtered American colonists. Had they followed the gentle Jesus and his Sermon on the Mount, they would have "turned the other cheek" instead of taking up muskets, and we would still be living under British domination and drinking tea.

Joseph Lieberman also advised us to look to the "compassion and love of Jesus of Nazareth" for spiritual guidance. Of all the politicians, Lieberman's religion seems most authentic and admirable. But surely he was not telling voters that they must drop everything and follow in Jesus's path to lead a life of suffering, submission, and sacrifice. All this Jesus talk gets suspicious when it supposedly leads us back to the Founders. In a campaign speech Lieberman declared: "John Adams, the second president of the United States, wrote that our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people."

Adams would be amused. He once posed the simple dictum: "The only foundation of a free constitution is pure virtue." But when French thinkers scrutinized our Constitution and asked, in effect, "Where's the Virtue?" Adams wrote a three-volume, fourteen-hundred-page treatise

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

demonstrating why virtue never worked in ancient republics and why America can dispense with it along with religion. "Neither Philosophy, nor Religion, nor Morality, nor Wisdom will ever govern Nations or Parties, against their Vanity, their Pride, their Resentment or Revenge, or their Avarice or Ambition."

Adams told the French critics that America's thirteen colonies and their new constitutions are "founded on the natural authority of the people alone, without a pretense of miracle or mystery." The rest of the world can now look to America to see how the "rights of mankind" can be grounded in constitutions that work of their own mechanisms.

> The experiment is made and has completely succeeded; it can no longer be called in question whether authority in magistrates and obedience in citizens can be grounded on reason, morality, and the Christian religion, without the monkery of priests or the knavery of politicians.

Adams looked to a well-structured political system to compensate for the unreliable incantations of religion and virtue.

The problem with Lieberman projecting religion back into American history is that Judaism lacks what Adams and others believed to be essential to understanding human nature—the concept of original sin, the very impediment that renders humanity too imperfect to imitate Jesus or to know God. "As a people," Lieberman exhorted, "we need to reaffirm our faith and restore the dedication to our God and to God's purposes." Easier said than done. "The Almighty has His own purposes," Abraham Lincoln told the American people when, during the bloody Civil War, he observed that both North and South prayed to the same God, and the appeals of neither were answered.

In his acceptance speech Lieberman mentioned God thirteen times. Several of those who came to his defense reminded us that the number didn't come close to Lincoln's many references to God. Yet it is one thing to refer to God and an entirely different matter to question a Supreme Being for having possibly willed a war and all its suffering and to tell the American people that they will be subjected to the "judgment of the Lord." In his famous "Second Inaugural Address," Lincoln came close to doubting God's omniscience and goodness because His ways remain unascertainable. "And that He gives to both North and South, this terrible war, as the woe due to those by whom the offence [slavery] came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which believers in a Living God always ascribed to Him?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Although Lincoln believed that the Bible contained certain moral truths (as did Shakespeare's plays), he doubted many of the doctrines of Christianity. Found among his papers after his death was a fragment of an essay on "Meditation on Divine Will," a subject which Lincoln acknowledged had surpassed his comprehension.

Listening to politicians, the public must have been unaware that America made a decisive break with religion when it turned to the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, and even many contemporary scholars and intellectuals seem to accept the politicians' view on religion, as indicated in a recent symposium on the subject in the Jewish journal *Tikkun* (November–December 2000) where Lieberman is uncritically cited as supposedly reiterating John Adams's statement that the Constitution was meant "only for a moral and religious people." Yet the eighteenth century had a different perspective. Thinkers like Ben Franklin were thrilled to see nature take the place of the supernatural and science replace religion. Consider the four foundational documents of the American Republic: Tom Paine's "Common Sense," Thomas Jefferson's "The Declaration of Independence," the Constitution as theorized by Alexander Hamilton and James Madison in *The Federalist*, and John Adams's "Defense" of the Constitution.

The author of the first document also wrote "The Age of Reason" to explain why America should leave religion to the Middle Ages. The "Declaration" derived from John Locke's empirical philosophy, which turned away from scripture as a source of authority. *The Federalist* drew upon David Hume's modern skepticism, wherein God disappears from philosophy for lack of proof. And Adams's voluminous work was influenced by Adam Smith, the economic philosopher who gave us *The Wealth of Nations*, which argued that we no longer need to look to God or worry about religious salvation because social approbation is more important.

Religion, to be sure, was not completely missing at the Republic's founding. Jefferson believed Jesus's teachings were worthwhile and saw the "Creator" as well as "Nature" as the source of unalienable rights; and while he agreed with Locke that human reason links humanity to God, he also believed with Locke that knowledge of God's nature and of His "purposes" remained beyond humanity's reach.

The shadow of sin falls all over *The Federalist*. The advice that its authors should have consulted Jesus before heading to the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia in 1787 would have had them roaring with laughter. Even though Hamilton later toyed with the idea of a "Christian commonwealth," at the time of the Constitution he and the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

framers were darkly existential in their conviction that neither philosophy nor religion, reason nor faith, love nor grace, can be relied upon to influence human conduct. Hamilton and Madison likened religious sects to political factions in their tendency to fanaticism, and they followed Hume in preferring a politics of "interest" to a politics of "zeal." Looking to the "science of politics" to see humankind as it is, and not to religion to see it as it ought to be, the Constitution trusts more in the "machinery of government" than in the morality of humanity to control power. Religion, in short, could not be counted on as a source of obedience.

The Founders had Europe in mind when distrusting religion as a mainstay of moral conduct as well as political freedom, and the reactionary role of the Catholic Church during the French Revolution could well have confirmed their outlook. But after the passing of the Founders, religion turned out to be progressive in American politics. The abolitionist movement felt the fire of religious conscience, as did the Social Gospel movement in the late nineteenth century. The Civil Rights movement of recent times and the anti-Vietnam War drives also had religion pitting conscience against evil. But the religion invoked by Martin Luther King, Jr. involved far more than letting Jesus do our thinking for us. King drew upon the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr for a realistic sense of power and the necessity of strategically applying the tactic of forceful pressure (such as sit-ins) within the restraints of nonviolence. "Lamentably," King wrote in *Why We Can't Wait*, "it is a historical fact that privileged groups seldom give up their privileges voluntarily. Individuals may see the moral light and give up their unjust posture; but, as Reinhold Niebuhr has reminded us, groups tend to be more immoral than individuals."

Perhaps our politicians need to be reeducated: What Would Niebuhr Do?

If politicians had wished to make a case for religion in America's political culture, they would have stood on firmer grounds citing, instead of the Founders and Lincoln, the French thinker Alexis de Tocqueville. In *Democracy in America*, written in the 1830s, Tocqueville praised religion in the United States because it reigned independently of the state, remained aloof from the transitory nature of political power, nurtured the spirit of liberty, offered consolation for the afflictions of life, and provided answers to the "primordial questions" of existence. Tocqueville wrote *Democracy* with Blaise Pascal in mind, and that may explain why he was struck by the country's mobility and the "restlessness" of a people supposedly in need of the stable "fixed idea" of God.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But the deeper question is whether the faiths of religion are stronger than the forces of democracy. Those who believe that is the case often cite Tocqueville's passage in which two questions are raised: "How could society escape destruction, if, when political ties are relaxed, moral ties are not tightened? And what can be done with a people master of itself if it is not subject to God?"

Tocqueville poses the questions precisely because they cannot be answered positively. In democratic society religion has people "following their habits rather than their convictions," and woe to any religion that dares stand in the way of the ingrained habit of self-interest and its pursuits. "Religion is often powerless to restrain men in the midst of innumerable temptations which fortune offers. It cannot moderate their eagerness to enrich themselves, which everything contributes to arouse, but it reigns supreme in the souls of women, and it is women who shape the mores." Yet once women begin to demand rights and the equalization of social relations, they, too, will leave religion behind as they pursue interest and power. "A passion for well-being" is "inflamed by equality" and stands as the "most striking and unalterable characteristic of democratic ages. It may be that, should any religion attempt to destroy this mother of all desires, it would itself be destroyed thereby."

Throughout the last decade many conservatives and much of the Republican Party convinced themselves that America enjoyed a "moral majority" of deeply religious people who would eventually oust the liberal Democratic Party for allowing America's moral ties to wither. Indeed, public opinion polls seemed to confirm that Americans believe that religious morality is indispensable. Yet when the Clinton scandals, involving sex in the Oval Office and the use of the Lincoln bedroom for fund raising, hit the press, the people praised the President for the country's economic performance while conservatives cried, "Where's the outrage?" Ironically, Tocqueville is a hero to many conservatives; had they read him properly, however, they would have understood that in democratic America religion and ethics cannot compete with a "passion for well-being" whose demands have no threshold of satisfaction.

The idea that America is a profoundly religious country comes up again and again in American history. In the 1950s, *Partisan Review* had a symposium on "Religion and the Intellectuals," and most contributors saw through the shallowness of the religiosity that would mark the Eisenhower years. Religion is secular rather than spiritual, lacking passion and conviction. Will Herberg wrote *Protestant-Catholic-Jew* to demonstrate that religion in America is a sociological phenomenon with each denomination affording people their identity in a mass society. It

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

could also be used by politicians who scarcely knew whereof they spoke. "Recognition of the Supreme Being," declared President Eisenhower in 1955, "is the first, most basic expression of Americanism. Without God, there could be no American form of government, nor an American way of life." To Herberg, such pronouncements were as insidious as they were idolatrous, as they were to Reinhold Niebuhr, who would cite Lincoln on the dangers of identifying God and country.

Is the intermingling of religion and politics such a bad thing? Many would like to believe that religion elevates politics to a higher standard of morality and that with religion people will come to take seriously the duties of citizenship, perhaps aspiring to virtue and goodness, maybe even to a "compassionate conservatism." In dissident movements at the margins of society, religion has been a powerful force for good. But at the center in presidential politics, the record of religion is dubious. Perhaps the most religious leader to occupy the White House was Woodrow Wilson, a leader who had no hesitation sending troops into Mexico and Central America because he assumed he was doing the right thing, as though Providence inhered in the Presidency.

To allow religion to have an important role in politics is to deny what America is all about. At the founding of America traditional religion carried the curse of the Old World. The interplay of religion and politics may have once characterized the Hebraic faith, and in historical Catholic and Islamic cultures religion became so inseparable from politics that lay life was constrained to serve divine authority in regimes that were essentially theocratic. Western Protestantism had also once proclaimed the dependence of religion on politics, until John Locke challenged the "divine right" of kings, thereby ridding the last vestiges of absolutism and paving the way for liberal, representative government and modern politics as we know it. In Lockean America, where government rests not on biblical truth but, as *The Federalist* authors put it, public "opinion," the role of the state was not to carry out God's will but simply to protect life and property. In this context, religion and politics are fundamentally incompatible. If there is one idea, or emotion, central to all religions, it is the eternal that has its status in the spiritual. But any politician who allows him- or herself to think beyond the immediate electorate would not be a politician. As Max Weber suggested in his classic address, "Politics as a Vocation," those who seek office in democratic society are as far from genuine religion as possible, for they are moved by the Christian sins of "pride" and "vanity," the "self-intoxicating temptation" to be in the spotlight to the detriment of humility, "the need to thrust one's person as far as

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

possible into the foreground." In making that point, Weber knew American history better than most American politicians as he tried to teach us of the deep tensions between politics and ethics.

Today it is widely assumed that the idea of the separation of church and state was simply a coincidence of a clause in the Constitution that was drafted in 1787. The impression is that the doctrine of separation was meant to keep religion out of politics; actually, it was the other way around. To the Puritans as well as to the Founders, the mingling of church and state "stank in the nostrils" (Roger Williams) because politics is, by definition, as distracting as it is corrupting, and hence a threat to the spiritual aims of life. Thus even an agnostic like myself is appalled to see a sentiment that is a mystical treasure sullied by a modern politics of fund raising and accusation, with no trace of love and friendship, and instead fueled by the emotions that Henry Adams saw as the very definition of politics: "the systematic organization of hatreds." It may well be, as George Santayana observed, that religion is better served by those who deny it, or by those who, like Lincoln, confess their own bewilderment before an enigma that refuses to reveal its reasons, than by those who believe it, or profess to believe it for political purposes.

WE MOURN THE PASSING OF

LIONEL ABEL

1911-2001

AN EARLY CONTRIBUTOR AND FRIEND

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LAWRENCE L. LANGER

Pursuit of Death in Holocaust Narrative

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NARRATIVE by its very nature explores a journey that has not yet reached its end. A recent study of the genre is called *Memory and Narrative: The Weave of Life-Writing*. It occurs to me that a study of Holocaust memory and narrative might justifiably be subtitled "The Weave of Death-Writing." Although Holocaust testimonies and memoirs are of course concerned with how one went on living in the midst of German atrocities, their subtexts offer us a theme that is more difficult to express or understand: how, under those minimal conditions, slowly but inexorably, one went on dying—every day, every hour, every minute of one's agonizing existence. We are forced to redefine the meaning of survival, as the positive idea of staying alive is usurped by the negative one of fending off death. The impact on consciousness of this dilemma is a neglected but important legacy of the experience we call the Holocaust.

The Holocaust survivors I am speaking of do not merely recover their lives in their narratives. Through complex associations with their murdered comrades, family members, and communities they also recover what I call their missed destiny of death. Because the logic of existence in places such as Auschwitz dictated that you should die, witnesses often feel that survival was an *abnormal* result of their ordeal in the camps, a violation of the expected outcome of their detention. They were not meant to return. Charlotte Delbo calls the first volume of her Auschwitz memoir *Aucun de nous ne reviendra* (*None of Us Will Return*). This has nothing to do with guilt or what some label a death wish but with a stubborn intuition that unlike the others, through accident or luck, those who held out somehow mistakenly eluded their intended end. In many instances the sensation of being dead while alive reflects a dual thrust of their present being: in chronological time they seek their future while in durational time, those isolated moments of dreadful memories that do not dissipate but congeal into dense claws of tenacious consciousness, a lethal past relentlessly pursues them.

According to Auschwitz survivor Jean Améry, mass murder in the form of genocide forced its victims to live not next door to but in the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

same room as death. Distinguishing between the violence of war and the rigid milieu of the camps Améry observed: "The soldier was driven into the fire, and it is true his life was not worth much. Still, the state did not order him to die, but to survive. The final duty of the prisoner, however, was death." In other words, the *necessity* of dying replaced the possibility of dying, even as many inmates struggled to stay alive—which is different from resolving to survive. Their surroundings, rather than some internal system of values inherited from their normal life, infiltrated the mental content of their days. What this meant can be illustrated by two brief excerpts from witness testimonies. Renee H., who was little more than ten years old at the time, recalls a scene from Bergen-Belsen:

> Right across from us was a charnel house filled with corpses, not just inside but overflowing all over. There were corpses all over. I lived, walked beside dead people. After a while it just got to be so that no one noticed, and one had to say to oneself, "I am not going to see who it is. I am not going to recognize anyone in this person who is lying there." It got to a point where I realized that I had to close my eyes to a number of things. Otherwise I would not have survived even at that time, because I saw people around me going mad. I was not only having to live with all things, but with madness.

We need to imagine how such imagery imprints itself on consciousness, despite efforts to avoid the unavoidable; but even more, we need to acknowledge the impact of such imagery on the unfolding of Holocaust narrative as memory stumbles repeatedly over death while it seeks to recount episodes of life in the camps under conditions of atrocity.

The second example is both more vivid and more graphic. It documents with uncanny if unintended precision a moment of failed purgation, as if the *body* were seeking to expel what memory could not cast out from consciousness:

> I got a job carrying people's waste out from the barrack at night . . . .I was very sick. I got diarrhea. That was already recuperating a little bit from the malaria. I walked out with two pails of human waste. . . ,and I was going toward the dump. I walked out, and between the barracks was a mountain of people as high as myself . . . .When the people died at night, they were put out and in the dump—a big pile of people. I said to myself "O God, must I walk by?" Meanwhile, I couldn't hold back, and I put down the two pails and sat down because I had a sick stomach. And the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> rats were standing and eating the people's faces. They were having a. . . .Anyway, I had to do my job. I was just looking, what is happening to a human being. That could have been my mother. That could have been my father. That could have been my sister or my brother. I pulled up my underpants, picked up the two buckets. I emptied them and came back to the barrack. There was nothing to throw up, but I threw up.

The sheer physicality of the description would dampen the ardor of those who insist on the triumph of the spirit even in Auschwitz, which is the locale of this remembered episode. The fusion of excrement, vomit, corpses, and predatory rats creates a cluster of images that forces us to redefine our notion of dying. At that moment the witness seemed to be trapped by a cycle of decay from which there was no escape. The cherished idea of the family as an intimate unit succumbed momentarily to the horrible alternative of the family as prey for hungry rodents. It leaves us numbed by the challenge of absorbing into our hopes for a human future this grim heritage of unnatural death.

I said that the witness, Hanna F., succumbed *momentarily* to a new and unprecedented vision of her family's fate, but this was more a charitable concession than a discovered truth. Such images may lurk in consciousness undeciphered, but they inspire insight only after being filtered through a mind determined to wrestle with the implications of the harsh burden that the Germans imposed on their victims. Jean Améry spent his post-camp life, which ended in suicide, unsuccessfully trying to placate the ghost of unnatural death that plagued him after his survival. In a now classic work called *At the Mind's Limits* he reported:

> There was once a conversation in the camp about an SS man who had slit open a prisoner's belly and filled it with sand. It is obvious that in view of such possibilities one was hardly concerned with whether, or *that*, one had to die, but with *how* it would happen. Inmates carried on conversations about how long it probably takes for the gas in the gas chambers to do its job. One speculated on the painfulness of death by phenol injections. Were you to wish yourself a blow to the skull or a slow death through exhaustion in the infirmary? It was characteristic for the situation of the prisoner in regard to death that only a few decided to "run to the wire," as one said, that is, to commit suicide through contact with the highly electrified barbed wire. The wire was after all a good and rather certain thing, but it was possible that in the attempt to approach it one would be caught first and thrown into the bunker,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> and that led to a more difficult and more painful dying. Dying was omnipresent, death vanished from sight.

Améry's variations on a theme of dying in Auschwitz leave little space for consolation. "These were the conditions under which the intellectual collided with death," he concluded. "Death lay before him, and in him the spirit was still stirring; the latter confronted the former and tried—in vain, to say it straight off—to exemplify its dignity."

Dying among the living, even when it is abrupt and painful, is a termination, and for those left behind society provides rituals of closure, including grief for the departed—we even have an appropriate vocabulary of solace—to ease the separation. But dying among the dying leaves us with no analogy to help us imagine the ordeal and find a suitable place in consciousness to lodge it. We have few narratives that portray such dying and its effect on traditional versions of the self. Améry's prisoners who discuss their possible doom bear no agency for their fate. They are left with a permanent uncertainty about the responsibility for their anguish, unable to blame a gas chamber or a hypodermic needle or the crushing force of a club. The absence of an identifiable human killer that allows one to trace a clear path from cause to effect is joined by another important hiatus that afflicts the memory of survivors, and that is the missing ritual of mourning. This is complicated by the foreknowledge that their own dying, when it occurs, will preclude a similar ritual for themselves. Permanently barred from details of how members of their families died, witnesses often seem less distressed by the illogic of those early deaths than by the "illogic" of their own continued lives. The psychic discontinuity implicit in such experience prevents the death of others—really, the murder of others—from being integrated into the natural rhythms of existence, leaving the survivor vainly groping for some tie between consequential living and inconsequential dying. The former is the text, the latter the subtext of numerous Holocaust narratives, oral and written, leading to a constant tension between pursuit and escape as divided consciousness seeks to integrate what cannot be reconciled—except perhaps in the ambiguous landscape of art.

The rift in time and memory that separates the unnatural death of others from one's own staying alive cries out for a bridge, but continuity is not its name. The vision of decay that reminds Hanna F. of her family's wretched end spreads its sway over the surrounding narrative terrain, contaminating efforts to soothe the transition from past to present or to free one to enter tranquilly into the future. The view that Holocaust survivors should be able to generalize their anguish in order

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to leave behind them the aura of death derives from unfamiliarity with how durational time assails the memory of many witnesses. On the deepest level, their life stories are also death stories, which include the partial death of the self in ways that still need to be interpreted. The quest for a rebirth of that part of the self is as futile as would be any effort to transform Hanna F.'s pile of corpses into a sacred community of the dead. This may be a dark view, but there is overwhelming evidence from Holocaust narratives that it is a realistic one, from which we have much to learn. The effect of atrocity, and not only Holocaust atrocity, on the modern sensibility is a virgin territory into which few analysts have yet ventured.

One of the many victims of these narratives is the very notion that we can expel from consciousness, and hence from being, zones of memory that threaten our intact spirits. Unnatural death creates an inversion of normality that we cannot easily dismiss. In her Auschwitz trilogy, Charlotte Delbo reproduces a monologue by a fellow survivor named Mado that because of its stylized intensity approaches the level of art, but nonetheless conveys the despair of a woman who is denied the remission of amnesia. She begins:

> It seems to me I'm not alive. Since all are dead, it seems impossible that I shouldn't be also. All dead. . . .All the others, all the others. How could those stronger and more determined than I be dead, and I remain alive? Can one come out of there alive? No, it wasn't possible. . . .I'm not alive. I see myself from outside this self pretending to be alive. I'm not alive. I know this with an intimate, solitary knowledge.

Mado's paradoxical refrain—"I'm not alive"—accents the need for a narrative form to capture the postwar effects of the daily rule during her imprisonment that to be alive was to be a candidate for death. Delbo has taken the liberty of discarding the chronological text of her friend's testimony, forcing us to face the full unblemished impact of Auschwitz time.

The thrust of Mado's existence is backwards, as if loyalty to her dead and sometimes murdered friends requires her to embrace a rupture between then and now that infiltrates and finally pollutes the purity of her aspirations toward the future. When her son is born she tries to feel happy. But memory will not allow her to. "The silky water of my joy," she says, "changed to sticky mud, sooty snow, fetid marshes. I saw again this woman—you remember this peasant woman, lying in the snow,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dead, with her dead newborn frozen between her thighs. My son was also that newborn." Thus even her present family is shrouded by the subtext of dying in the camps. The challenge of learning how to live while continuing to participate in the unnatural death of others haunts Mado as a persistent melancholy legacy from that time. As the habit of "holding out" *then* nurtures in Mado the practice of "making do" *now*, a psychology of endurance breeds in her a new sense of who she is, of what she has become. She recalls her companions arguing in the camps that if they returned, everything would be different. But they were wrong. "Everything is the same," Mado discovers. "It is within us that nothing is the same." This is not a loss of identity but a *shift* in identity, a painfully honest confession that the self has been split not by some psychotic condition but by the twin realities that inhabit her spirit. Mado admits that to forget the durational subtext in order to return to the chronological narrative of her life would be atrocious, then adds that it would be impossible too. "People believe memories grow vague," she ends her monologue, "are erased by time, since nothing endures against the passage of time. That's the difference: time does not pass over me, over us. It doesn't erase anything, doesn't undo it. I'm not alive. I died in Auschwitz but no one knows it."

Of course, Mado is right. No one but she and Delbo and the handful of other Frenchwomen who returned from their transport to Auschwitz can hope to enter the dark inner realm where the theme of being dead while alive enacts its paradoxical drama. Yet perhaps she is mistaken too. Her words allow us to see feelingly, then to imagine the contours of that alien world, and the missed destiny of death that assaults it. An alliance with atrocity is part of the burden of modernity, though it is both simpler and less troublesome to pretend that it is not. Atrocity narrative requires us to abandon the conviction that the gift of life is antithetical to the menace of unnatural death. Writers like Delbo entreat us to discard this consoling template of reality as a remnant of an ancient nostalgia rather than retaining it as a still-useful blueprint for designing the future after Auschwitz.

Sometimes episodes surface in Holocaust testimonies that seem to transgress our sense of the possible, to reveal a reality so beyond our imaginings that we rush to consign them to the realm of fantasy. But anyone immersed in the world of atrocity will be forced to concede that few powers of invention could conjure up some of the most gruesome moments of the camp experience. From an eyewitness in the Natzweiler-Struthof concentration camp comes the following account to confirm the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

intricate bond linking living and dying for the victimized in the Holocaust universe:

> On July 8, 1942, I was witness to a terrifying event that will never fade from my memory. In the corridor of the infirmary stood six coffins in a stack. They were crates hammered together of rough boards, out of which blood seeped through the joints. Suddenly a knocking could be heard from the bottom coffin. A weak voice quavered, "Open up! Open up! I am still alive!" The Greens [deported criminals] pulled out the bottom coffin and opened it. A Polish prisoner with an injured head and broken legs stared out at us from the coffin, in which he was lying with a dead man. I wanted to intervene, to free him from his terrifying situation, but I was immediately pushed aside by one of the professional criminals. A few dull thuds, then the coffin was nailed shut again and sent to the crematorium.

Edgar Allan Poe's literary fascination with similar imagery seems an amateurish harbinger of this grisly historical version of a troika joining the living, the dying, and the dead. It introduces into the discourse of atrocity a fresh concept for defining consciousness after the Holocaust, the idea of a coffined self to share with more vital contents of identity the numbing legacy that the unnatural death of others has bequeathed us.

The visible distance separating life from death was at times narrowed to a fine line in the Holocaust universe; at others, it seemed to disappear entirely. As the reverence for life vanishes, the customary reverence for the dead and the dying fades too. For students of this era, some space must be found for an intellectual response to reports like the following from Buchenwald, which violate our sense of reason and logic, to say nothing of humanity, but which nevertheless form part of the memory of those open to their impact:

> In my service as a mason during the building of the new crematorium, I could observe things that probably are still not known. . . . As long as the new ovens were not yet finished, the old one was still used. Between the old and the new ovens was a wall of boards. After the first new oven was ready, the wall was moved between it and the second new oven under construction. . . .At this time many Russian prisoners of war were murdered by shots to the base of the skull. When the murderers arrived with a truckload of victims, the bodies were delivered directly into the basement through a built-in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> shute. Every time the Nazis let bodies slide down into the cellar, howling and groaning arose—proof that many of the victims were not yet completely dead, since they returned to consciousness when they struck the cement floor of the cellar. Whether these still-living, unfortunate victims of the murderous beasts were then beaten to death or were sent into the ovens while still alive, I don't know. . . . When we built the chimneys of the crematorium, I once saw three and another time two Russian soldiers standing alive, in the courtyard. They were led into the crematorium—and then I saw nothing of them again.

To familiar tales of the living dead we must now add sinister hints of the dying living, drawn not from the annals of superstition but from an authentic record of witnessed incidents.

Straight narrative cannot begin to help us absorb the shock of this brutal transition from life to death without any clear sign of the cessation of one before the advent of the other. As the conditions of being and nonbeing merge and blur, we are left groping for a way to extend the range of implication that assaults us from the region of that crematorium. "For those who were in Auschwitz," Charlotte Delbo wrote in *Useless Knowledge*, the second volume of her Auschwitz trilogy, "waiting was a path leading to death." For those who returned from Auschwitz, she might have added, memory became a path leading to and through death; she sought to capture this twisted journey of consciousness in a concise poem that entwines both worlds in a knot of intimacy which not even reading can disentangle:

> I've come back from another world
> To this world
> I had not left
> And I know not
> Which one is real
> Tell me did I really come back
> From the other world?
> As far as I'm concerned
> I'm still there
> Dying there
> A little more each day
> Dying over again
> The death of those who died
> and I no longer know which is the real one
> this world, right here,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

or the world over there
now
I no longer know
when I am dreaming
and when
I do not dream.

If a line like "Dying over again / The death of those who died" expresses not merely a memory of the past but an abiding presence, then we are left dwelling in a middle realm where living and dying merge and re-form, and for which few narrative strategies help us to understand how they might blend in contemporary consciousness.

Fortunately, at least one writer has made this issue the focus of his artistic career, and his extensive reflections on the theme allow us to enter the anteroom of the creative imagination as it struggles to nurture its vision with the residue of unnatural death. Born in Spain in 1924, raised and educated in France after the defeat of the Spanish republican forces, Jorge Semprun joined the French resistance movement as a teenager and in 1943 was arrested by the Gestapo. In January 1944 he was deported to the Buchenwald concentration camp near Weimar, where he remained until his liberation in April of 1945. Among his translated works, the novels *The Long Voyage* and *What a Beautiful Sunday!* and the memoir *Literature or Life* explore the fictional and nonfictional narrative possibilities of his Buchenwald experience, whose corrosive influence, as with Primo Levi, remained imprinted on Semprun's consciousness and imagination long after the time of the ordeal itself.

In *Literature or Life*, originally published in 1994 as *L'écriture ou la vie* (*Writing or Life*), Semprun addresses the question of which obstacles the writer must overcome in order to evoke the reality of Holocaust atrocity. He is blunt in dismissing the common charge that the event is indescribable. "The 'ineffable' you hear so much about," he alleges, "is only an alibi. Or a sign of laziness." The problem was not with the "form of a possible account," but with the *content* which, though describable, might be unbearable. How to tell what is too painful to be told, how to turn an experience, grotesque and agonizing as it may have been, into narrative? The French title, *Writing or Life*, implies that whatever model Semprun devises for a narrative frame, it will sanction an alternative to rather than an expression of his existence after Buchenwald. The details of his camp experience were like unwieldy clay, stubbornly resisting

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

efforts to mold or shape them into a form that an audience not used to such dense matter might recognize and accept.

Semprun left Buchenwald still bathed in the odor and memories of the death that had consumed so many of his underground companions, to say nothing of the thousands of others, especially Jews, who had perished in other parts of the camp. Indeed, as we learn from the text, he initially planned to call his memoir *L'écriture ou la mort*, (*Writing or Death*), here suggesting an equivalency rather than an opposition, but subsequently changed his mind, leaving to his readers the chore of deciphering the subtle meaning of the shift. What he had discovered was that the joy of writing could not dispel the sorrow of memory. Having learned to identify the many smells of death in Buchenwald, Semprun was left with the dilemma of luring readers committed to life into the perimeters of this lethal regime, the domain of what he called "despairing memory." This was no easy task. One who outlived the catastrophe wrote about it with a ghost mentality, struggling to connect to the living while mired in the reminiscence of a doom that changed the identity of virtually all victims into effigies of future corpses.

Despairing memory is a prime source of narrative consciousness, as Semprun searches for the precise brew that will combine the sense experience of unnatural death with its verbal expression. "And suddenly," he writes, "borne on the breeze, the curious odor: sweetish, cloying, with a bitter and truly nauseating edge to it. The peculiar odor that would later prove to be from the crematory oven." The transition is swift: "The strange smell would immediately invade the reality of memory. I would be reborn there; I would die if returned to life there. I would embrace and inhale the muddy, heady odor of that estuary of death." He has only to close his eyes, and in an instant he is sucked from what he calls "the shimmering opacity of life's offerings" back into the maw of death at Buchenwald. There is memory as recall and memory as affliction, and Semprun nurses both until they swell into a deluge that submerges him without offering warning or refuge.

Semprun is left with two problems: finding a style to depict how the reign of death in Buchenwald has afflicted him, and making this feeling accessible to his audience without shocking them into disbelief or flight. Death is a constant companion of the survivor: "I'm struck by the idea," he writes, "if one can call it an idea. . .struck by the sudden overwhelming feeling, in any case, that I have not escaped death, but passed through it. Rather that it has passed through me. That I have, in a way, lived through it. That I have come back from it in the way you return from a voyage that has transformed and—perhaps—transfigured you."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It was as if Buchenwald were surrounded by a river Styx: souls ferried across it into the realm of death left some of their lives behind, while those who violated its rule by returning in the other direction—we call them survivors—had left some of their *deaths* behind but brought back with them the memory of their own partial demise.

The result, in Semprun's language, would be a transfigured ghost, though I think a more accurate name would be a "disfigured" one. If the impact of a journey through the otherworld of Buchenwald is to be properly characterized, then we might do well to avoid terms like "transfigured" that echo a spiritual reality far from Semprun's intentions. Indeed, Semprun seems aware of this danger when he ironically introduces a vocabulary of redemption to subvert its relevance to his ordeal: "Perhaps I have not simply survived death, but been resurrected from it. Perhaps from this moment on, I am immortal." He invites his readers to distinguish between a near-death and a "post-death" experience, knowing that the only language available to them is the language of immortality that he has just used himself. The main thrust of his discourse is to sabotage the value of such words in the context of Buchenwald memory. For most of us, the idea of a post-death experience is a logical impossibility when it is beyond the pale of debate about eternal life. Semprun invites us to consider an unprecedented passage from life through death back to life, not as a voyage into a mythical underworld such as the one undertaken by Odysseus or Aeneas, but as a human journey on earth. The ensuing paradox is not easy to absorb, to say nothing of translating it into the art of narrative. But Semprun is ready for the challenge: "On this April morning [the day of his liberation from Buchenwald], it is exciting to imagine that thenceforward, growing old will not bring me closer to death, but quite the contrary, carry me away from it."

In his novels one of Semprun's greatest innovations was to break the hold of chronological time and to find a narrative technique to sustain a new disjointed relationship among past, present, and future. He struggled in his memoir to outline the mortal injury that death in Buchenwald had inflicted on chronology:

> The essential thing about this experience of Evil is that it will turn out to have been lived as the experience of death. . . .And I do mean "experience". . . .Because death is not something that we brushed up against, came close to, only just escaped, as though it were an accident we survived unscathed. We lived it. . . .Because it's not believable, it can't be shared, it's barely comprehensible—since

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> death is, for rational thought, the only event that we can never experience individually. . .that cannot be grasped except in the form of anguish, of foreboding or fatal longing. . . .In the future perfect tense, therefore.

As the past continued to overtake and displace the future, society had to consider a new phenomenon, the deathlife of the self that the Holocaust had introduced into current dialogue about the possible effects of atrocity on modern consciousness. Semprun expressed more lucidly than any of his literary confederates the philosophical and artistic idea that was invading Holocaust thinking and marked the difference, as he saw it, between traditional and post-camp sensibilities. He drew a distinction between living life and living death, arguing that rational deliberation had no category for the reality introduced by the camp ordeal. Semprun boldly redefined brotherhood as "having lived the experience of death as a collective and even fraternal experience." It took time for him to understand what this meant. He described the impasse that led him, some months after his release from Buchenwald, to suspend writing for more than a decade on the novel that would become *The Long Voyage*: "The two things I had thought would bind me to life—writing, pleasure—were instead what estranged me from it, day after day, constantly returning me to the memory of death, forcing me back into the suffocation of memory." Semprun's meditations on this finding provide a dramatic instance of the literary imagination at work trying to shape what I call a narrative of atrocity. "Fundamentally," he concluded, "I was nothing other than a conscious residue of all that death." As he elaborates, savoring his words as if they were items on a gourmet menu, we overhear the voice of the artist in quest of the best means for joining ordinary present consciousness to extraordinary past experience: "An individual patch in the impalpable material of that shroud. A dust mote in the ashy cloud of that agony. A still-flickering light from the extinguished star of our dead years." Surviving the unnatural death of others, at least *this* death of *those* others, shrinks (without effacing entirely) the life impulse. Slowly, Semprun drafted the terms for turning this insight into literature:

> I possess nothing more than my death, my experience of death, to recount my life, to express it, to carry it on. I must make life with all that death. And the best way to do this is through writing. Yet that brings me back to death, to the suffocating embrace of death.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> That's where I am: I can live only by assuming that death through writing, but writing literally prohibits me from living.

Originally, as we have heard, he called his memoir *Writing or Death*, only to discover that his presumed antonyms had become synonyms; hence the change to *Writing or Life*, stressing the hard won reversal that had emerged from his discovery of the price one must pay for an art of atrocity.

These are alien intellectual aromas for those of us who have not breathed the toxic air of German concentration and death camps until it became a natural form of inhalation, leaving a residue in the lungs of memory that a return to normal living could not purge. Semprun called it a "wisdom of the body," a physical knowledge that would last forever in the secular eternity where his consciousness dwelt. Buchenwald time was durational rather than fleeting, and throughout his career Semprun strove to fashion a literary voice for this notion. That voice, he came to believe, must be artistic, not historical, since only the art and artifice of fiction could beguile the imagination into embracing what was being said. Writing, he insisted, revived and sharpened the sorrow of memory, whose barbs were a constant reminder of the interlocking truth that what he had lived through was also and at the same time what he had died through. For all their other merits, he felt, historians could not convey the ambiguity of this essential truth of the Holocaust universe with the vigor and conviction of the literary craftsman.

To have as an artistic goal "to make life with all that death" through writing is to specify the main hazard of Holocaust narrative, and like George Steiner and others Semprun is wary of the limits of language that hinder this labor. In his memoir he struggled with various translations of Wittgenstein's seemingly obvious statement that "*Der Tod ist kein Ereignis des Lebens. Den Tod erlebt man nicht*" ("Death is not an event in life. Death cannot be lived"), because he knew that Buchenwald had vandalized its accuracy. He varied the translation, striving for more precise meaning. For "Death cannot be lived" he substituted the more active "One cannot live death," and later, "Death is not a lived experience." Finally, he decided that "Wittgenstein's pronouncement ought to be phrased like this: *my* death is not an event in *my* life. I will not live *my* death." For Semprun and his fellow survivors death was an event in life, and they had "lived" death, the death of others, though no available explanations helped make the magnitude of that insight more credible. "*Erleben*" meant to live through an event, but there was no word to signify an event that one had died through ("*ersterben*" means to die

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

away or become extinct). Yet Semprun knew that a Holocaust literature lacking this concept could not be totally authentic, faithful to the incidents it tried to imagine.

The imagination was the crucial faculty that had to be addressed and transformed, injected with a literary serum to enable it to add to its capacity a wholly new power of representation. Semprun's search for a narrative "I" to recreate for his readers "death experienced right up to its blinding limit" took him far beyond the aspirations of a Tolstoy in *The Death of Ivan Ilych*. For Tolstoy, suffering, even the extreme physical agony of the dying Ivan Ilych, could be a redemptive occasion because Tolstoy and most of his readers shared belief in the model of a compassionate Redeemer. Writing Ivan Ilych's story was an act of spiritual liberation. Contrast this with Semprun's account of the impact on him of writing his Buchenwald novel, *The Long Voyage*:

> [writing] thrust me back into death, drowning me in it. I choked in the unbreathable air of my manuscript: every line I wrote pushed my head underwater as though I were once again in the bathtub of the Gestapo's villa in Auxerre [where Semprun had been tortured to make him reveal the names of other underground members]. I struggled to survive. I failed in my attempt to speak of death in order to reduce it to silence: if I had continued, it would have been death, in all probabilities, that would have silenced me.

Only after he absorbed into his own consciousness the recognition that life and death were no longer a sequence but an unsettling alliance, a fusion of forces that constantly operated on each other, could he finish his novel. He pacified death's pursuit of him in memory by allowing his pursuit of death in narrative to dominate the world of his imagination. Narrative form displaced the chaos of remembering.

After the war, watching a familiar newsreel of bulldozers shoveling dead bodies into mass graves, Semprun intuitively grasped why such images of atrocity seemed so inadequate: "They were silent above all," he writes, "because they said nothing precise about the reality they showed, because they delivered only confused scraps of meaning." For him, the process of witnessing was not enough. Images had to be situated "not only in a historical context but within a continuity of emotions." The impulse that steered Semprun to the vocation of Holocaust writer was enshrined in controversial assertions such as the following, which are still subject to dispute among Holocaust commentators: "One would have to treat the documentary reality, in short, like the material

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of fiction." The revelation freed him to invent the imagined universe of *The Long Voyage*, a novel whose roots reach deep into his Buchenwald experience but which achieves its narrative form by rearranging in its narrator's consciousness the details of the deathlife he has survived.

Concepts like "deathlife" and "the coffined self" are not to be found in histories of the Holocaust. Tracing the course of Germany's mass murders through documentary records is an essential scholarly task for our understanding of those events, but their psychological and emotional milieus constitute equally compelling themes whose expression requires utterly different narrative strategies. The first-person narrator of Semprun's *The Long Voyage* is in a boxcar on its way to Buchenwald throughout the novel, but his journey is internal as well as external. Even as he undergoes the ordeal of the trip in the present, he remembers and "foremembers," since the experience has fragmented him into a splintered self: he is simultaneously a partisan in the French underground, a deported prisoner of the Germans, and a survivor of Buchenwald. Details of his life in past, present, and future flow through his mind like multiple currents in an unimpeded stream. Death spreads its tentacles in both directions, tainting memories of innocent prewar friendships because he learns later that many of his friends have been killed, and poisoning his postwar life through his discovery that being alive after Buchenwald is not the same as having survived it intact. By recreating consciousness as an intersection of three time zones, Semprun is able to duplicate for the reader the fluid timeless ordeal of the camp inmate who has lost his sense of life as a chronological passage from yesterday through today into tomorrow. He also converts the idea of death as a single, natural fate into a mutation that plots death as a common, unnatural doom.

Semprun's narrator begins to learn about this unnatural doom on the journey itself which lasts for five days and four nights. He is jammed up against another deportee whom he calls "the guy from Semur" (a village in France), and during the voyage they exchange reminiscences about their earlier lives and speculations about their destination. They appear to be bonded in life, whatever the future holds for them, but as they arrive at Buchenwald death anticipates them, as the exhausted guy from Semur slumps against the narrator's shoulder and dies. Earlier the guy from Semur had complained that he felt as though his heart were dead, and when the narrator asks him what that means, he replies: "I wouldn't know how to tell you. . . .You don't feel anything in your heart, like a hole, or else like a very heavy stone." It is a workable definition of the condition I call "deathlife," although it will

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

be some time before the narrator grasps its meaning. The act of "foremembering" gives us a glimpse into how that process will work.

The narrator has a vivid impression of the impact of deathlife on memory while dining at a friend's house after the war, when his hostess announces that she has planned a Russian dinner. This triggers a time warp in consciousness for the narrator, who explains

> and so it was that suddenly I had a piece of black bread in my hand, and mechanically I bit into it, meanwhile continuing the conversation. Then, the slightly acid taste of the black bread, the low mastication of this gritty black bread, brought back, with shocking suddenness, the marvelous moments when, at camp, we used to eat our ration of bread. . . .I was sitting there motionless, my arm raised, with my slightly acid, buttered slice of good black bread in my hand, and my heart was pounding like a triphammer.

His hostess asks him if anything is the matter, and his reverie continues "Nothing was the matter. A random thought of no consequence. Obviously I couldn't tell her that I was in the throes of dying, dying of hunger, far far from them, far from the wood fire and the words they were saying."

As someone who had fended off death in Buchenwald, Semprun belongs to a generation of survivors—their numbers continue to grow today—who enact in a portion of consciousness "the throes of dying" even as they move on with their lives. As unnatural dying, mass murder, or some other form of atrocity spreads across the landscape of modernity, Semprun's struggle to find for it an artistic voice seems an early recognition of its complex and disconcerting force. Elie Wiesel once remarked of his father's miserable end in Buchenwald that the Germans deprived him not only of his life, but also of his death, and this is the very paradox from which Semprun seeks to wrest some significance in his narrative. But the first step is to find a way of expressing the idea that the meaning of one's life can no longer be separated from the meaningless death of others, and to do this he literally transmutes consciousness into a physical substance and plunges the reader directly into its wounded core:

> In the spongy mass that sits behind my forehead, between my painful neck and burning temples, where all the throbbing pains in my body, which is breaking into a thousand pieces of sharp glass, in that spongy mass from which I would like to be able to draw

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> with both hands (or rather with delicate tongs, once the bony plate which covers it has been lifted) the cotton-like filaments, streaked perhaps with blood, which must fill all the cavities and keep me from thinking clearly, which becloud the whole interior, what they call consciousness, into that spongy mass there works its way the idea that perhaps my death will not even manage to be something real, that is, something that belongs to someone else's life, at least one person's. Perhaps the idea of my death as something real, perhaps even that possibility will be denied me, and I cast about desperately to see who might miss me, whose life I might affect, might haunt by my absence and at that precise moment, I find no one, my life hasn't any real possibility, I wouldn't even be able to die, all I can do is efface myself, quietly eliminate myself from this existence, Hans would have to be alive, Michel would have to be alive for me to have a real death, a death somehow linked to reality, for me not to vanish completely into the stench-filled darkness of this boxcar.

Hans and Michel are two of his murdered comrades, and if memory and consciousness cannot resurrect them, at least through the anguish of Semprun's art they may be made to seem less dead. This must be what Semprun meant when, as we have heard, he wrote in his memoir "I possess nothing more than my death, my experience of death, to recount my life, to express it, to carry it on. I must make life with all that death." To make life with all that death: it may be that the anxiety nurtured by this issue in *The Long Voyage* and in much other Holocaust testimony and narrative will prove to be nothing more than a prelude to a fundamental and persistent challenge that is destined to afflict modern consciousness well into the future.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

YFAAT WEISS

The Faint Echoes of German Discourse in Israel

At the beginning of the 1990s, Jerusalem's Khan Theater chose to stage George Tabori's adaptation of Peter Sichrovsky's play "Born Guilty." In the last few years, Sichrovsky, who is acting the Jewish fig leaf for Austrian anti-Semitism, has been somewhat thrust into the limelight: he is the representative of Austria's Jörgen Haider's "Freedom Party" in the European Parliament. But in 1986, Sichrovsky was a Viennese Jewish journalist who chose to deal with issues relating to the "second generation." Sichrovsky divided the issues into two separate areas: the Jewish and the Nazi spheres. He documented the doubts of the Jewish second generation in his book *Strangers in Their Own Land: Young Jews in Germany and Austria Today* and, two years later, turned to the children of active Nazis in his book *Born Guilty: Children of Nazi Families*. Now that Sichrovsky has come such a long way, addressing the two sets of experiences can be depicted as a sign of things to come. But at the end of the 1980s, these were two interesting books, candid and revealing, about the identity dilemmas of young people who were born into a complex, biographical reality.

Writing about "echoes" is bound to be impressionistic. But I recall that when watching young Israeli actors at the Khan Theater, who tried to be a "second generation" of Nazis, I was unable to suppress my temptation to giggle. Although these professional actors had learned to play their parts convincingly, the combination of the Hebrew language complete with native "Sabra" slang and Israeli body language made it impossible to convey any kind of foreign atmosphere, let alone a German or Austrian one. The alienation between actors and text was conspicuous throughout the entire performance. The evening was one of recitation, and if anything of the agonizing of the Nazi second generation in Germany and Austria came over to the Israeli audience, it was on the level of the text rather than of acting. In this context, the Khan's actors were functioning like "readers."

The Reader, by Bernhard Schlink, was published in Germany in 1995, and reached the Hebrew reading public in 1998. Its topic, too, is

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

about the second generation—the German version. The protagonist is Michael, a fifteen-year-old boy, who at the end of the 1950s, in Germany, gets embroiled in a flirtation-*cum*-love affair with Hanna, then thirty-six years old. The insignificant affair between the young boy and the mature woman takes a dramatic turn when, six years later, Michael—by this time a law student—meets Hanna again: but this time Hanna is not the woman who took his erotic world by storm, but one of the defendants in a trial of SS women who worked in a concentration camp near Cracow who, by the end of the trial, had become the primary accused.

The plot is fictitious, but Schlink's book tries to grope its way into the minds of the German second generation. Schlink, a professor of law, was born in 1944. He wants to both understand and condemn the Nazi past. His book is innocent of revisionism; it does not question the criminal nature of the Nazis' actions. But it disputes the second generation's sweeping condemnation of the generation of the perpetrators. The ambivalence which haunts Michael in his emotional and physical encounters with Hanna—varying between knowing about her actions and attraction to her—constitutes a general metaphor for the relationships between the generations. Hanna, as the reader comes to learn, preferred to join the SS instead of being promoted at the Siemens company—because this promotion would have exposed the fact that she was illiterate. Her need to hide this handicap was greater than any ethical yardstick or other internal moral conflict. The feeling of shame about her illiteracy and the terror of discovery were what made Hanna assume responsibility in the course of the trial for actions which she had not carried out. Hanna is a victim of her youth in the first stage, and of the postwar legal system in the second stage. Michael is also a victim, a victim of this impossible love, which casts a deep shadow over his life, blunting his senses and leaving him emotionally barren.

To date, Bernhard Schlink's book has sold fifteen thousand copies in Israel, making it an Israeli bestseller. But, it is extremely difficult to know how Israelis read it. The few reviews that appeared in Israeli literary supplements manifested much interest. One of the critics even noted with satisfaction that the level of sales testifies "to a welcome contrast between the political world and our literary republic. In Israeli politics," he noted, "the position of victim is a spot much in demand, competed for by every public activist, every party, every sector, and every religious group." The fact that the Israeli public is prepared to read with interest a book constructed on the recognition that you yourself are a passive partner in crime, that you are the criminal, was presented in the eyes of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the critic as proof of the fact that "victim politics still have not managed to entirely corrupt the reading public."

It would appear that the historian's touch was needed in order to ruin the literary experience of the amateur critic. "This is a book," writes Omer Bartov,

> in which the real victims of the period are faceless; although the author does not deny their torments, they remain abstract beings incapable of arousing any emotion whatsoever in the readers. The victims whom we meet belong to Germany's second generation, and at their side are the innocent murderers, the illiterate, who had no choice: wretched figures trapped in the inescapable destiny of history; it is the torments of these figures which arouse in us identification and anguish.

The Reader, as Bartov points out with a considerable degree of justification,

> deals with Germany as victim, Germany as a victim of its history . . .of such massive and thorough murder that even those who perform it become its victims. . .[as does] the second generation. This is the German destiny. It is indeed possible that Hanna (in her period in jail after the trial) might read the memoirs of Primo Levi, Jean Emery, Tadeusz Borowski; but Michael suffers his own torments. Try as he may, he is unable to understand the anguish of those who were tortured by Hanna and her colleagues. He can feel their torments only to the extent that he relates their fate to his, since after all, from his point of view he is the only victim with whom he is capable of identifying.

It is, of course, quite impossible to determine the nature of the great interest which the book aroused in Israel; and the claim that it sold fifteen thousand copies is still open to interpretation. But it may be relevant to link this commercial success to another best-seller, also a controversial work, and also to some extent related, albeit indirectly, to the issue of the second generation—Daniel Jonah Goldhagen's book *Hitler's Willing Executioners* (1996). While Schlink's book addresses the experience and identity of the German second generation, of the victim and the murderer, they are not at the center of Goldhagen's book, though undoubtedly closely related to its reception.

This book is one of the few academic books about the Holocaust which quickly became a bestseller. Goldhagen, the son of a Holocaust

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

survivor, has been repeatedly mentioned in Germany as part of the public debate, so that reviewers could discredit and disqualify his book. In this context, to argue that the author lacked objectivity followed directly from the arguments put forward during the Germans' "Historikerstreit" of 1987–88. At the time, Martin Broszat argued in the course of the correspondence between himself and Saul Friedländer that his generation, the Hitler Jugend generation, was better qualified than the generation of the victims and their children to write objectively about the period. In any case, members of the German academic establishment found it difficult to digest Goldhagen's book, which clearly rejected their own scientific work and made sweeping claims about the historical nature of German anti-Semitism. The writer's identity, as an American, a Jew, and a political scientist, provoked many negative emotions, both relevant and irrelevant.

However, among the young third generation of German academics, Goldhagen's book enjoyed a particularly sympathetic reaction; and it was used as a way of arousing the anger of Germany's academic establishment and the parental generation. The book's contents, and the eloquent style of its author, who came to Germany to promote his book, provided the German third generation with more satisfactory answers to some of the questions raised by the extermination of the Jews than the answers by German academics. The sympathetic reaction to Goldhagen's book in Germany expresses dissatisfaction with the professional approach to the study of the Holocaust, with its emphasis on pedantic structural models and its inability to deal with the emotional motivation of the murderers.

Its constant addressing of the murderers' motivation, plus its fresh focus on the emotional and ideological background made Goldhagen's book so successful in Germany. In turn, this may be precisely why it is not particularly attractive to Israelis. Bartov, in an article comparing the reception of *Hitler's Willing Executioners* in the United States, Germany, France, and Israel, notes with a certain degree of irony:

> Since the book's main thesis was so familiar to Israelis, it could not but appear banal; people simply could not understand what was innovative about an argument that presented the Germans as anti-Semitic murderers of Jews. This was what they learned in school, read in books, heard on the radio, watched on television, heard from relatives. Israelis might be curious about German reactions to this statement; but as for the person on the street, this was simply obvious.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Goldhagen's book did not become the subject of great attention, selling only 6,334 copies in Israel, nor did his visit cause a stir (in fact, it took place behind the closed doors of the Holocaust Research Institute at Yad Vashem). And another book, the diaries of Victor Klemperer (*I Will Bear Witness: A Diary of the Nazi Years*), created quite a commotion in Germany, and failed altogether to reach Israel. Klemperer, a professor of Romance language literature at Dresden University, and a converted Jew married to a German, survived the entire Nazi period in Dresden. The commercial success of Klemperer's diaries in Germany exceeded all expectations, placing the former East German publishing house Aufbau on firm footing. I do not know whether an Israeli publisher is currently arranging for the book to be translated into Hebrew, but if so, I doubt there would be much of a readership—most likely, if translated into Hebrew, it would be used as a text for a class on the historical sources of Nazism at one of Israel's universities.

Why do Klemperer's diaries manage to arouse such great interest in Germany, while in Israel—beyond the academic audience—nothing has yet been heard about them? Perhaps, paradoxically, for the very same reason: for the educated German public, Klemperer is fascinating because, although he has a Jewish background, he does not represent the ultimate stranger. A Christian of Jewish origin, married to a Christian German woman, with pronounced German nationalist feelings, surrounded by a German social and professional circle remote from Judaism and hostile to Jewish nationalism, Klemperer is a German in almost all respects, apart from his origin. In the course of the 1930s, Klemperer becomes a Jew while continuing to be a German. As a result, he enables many Germans to feel for the first time what they do not succeed in feeling when they are incapable of going beyond their German perceptions. He arouses identification. He is like them, and they can feel his isolation in the most intimate fashion, since his external and internal worlds are familiar to them.

If Israeli readers were provided with access to Klemperer's text in Hebrew, it is not clear what they would feel about it. Klemperer's German nationalism would probably arouse objections on their part, while his hostility towards manifestations of Jewish identity, and in particular his hate for Zionism, could only anger the Israelis. For the educated German reader, Klemperer is a counterpart who simply lived through a dark period, while in the eyes of the educated Israeli he is a strange and alien creature, and certainly will not arouse any particular identification.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Most of the debates, events and dilemmas which engross the German public in connection with their past are completely alien to Israelis. A good example of this is provided by the German controversy which raged eleven years ago about the appropriate way of commemorating the destruction of European Jewry in Germany. The starting point for this commemoration was without precedent; there have been few, if any, cases in which the collective of murderers has chosen to commemorate its victims. Actually, Western Germany has memorialized the victims of the Holocaust in every town, and in the concentration camps, for many years. Such commemorations were completely different in the former Eastern Germany. There, an antifascist interpretation was the norm, and it ignored the fact that the Jews were victimized as Jews. The designated commemoration site, which was approved in principle by Germany's parliament in 2000, is intended to commemorate all of the Jews of Europe—not just German Jews—who were murdered by Nazi Germans. Its planned location is in the center of Berlin, the capital of the united German Republic, next to the renovated Reichstag building that now serves as the German parliament—the Bundestag. Its massive presence is clearly meant to prevent the illusion of any turning back of the clock to a Greater Germany with Berlin as its capital.

The promoters of the present project drew their inspiration—as has been emphasized by Professor Eberhard Jäckel, an influential leading Holocaust scholar at Stuttgart University—from the commemoration site at Yad Vashem. Jäckel, by his own account, asked himself during one of his many visits to Yad Vashem why Germany has no such site. This very comparison shows the depth of the difference: Yad Vashem commemorates the Holocaust victims amongst their own people, while Jäckel's initiative arises from a desire to create the presence of the victims among the children and grandchildren of the murderers. The many arguments which have raged around this project have reflected the dilemmas: What is the right degree of abstractness for a site of this kind? What balance should there be between the emotional effect the site will create, its pedagogical impact, and the conveying of historical background? Should the site include only Jewish victims or should it refer to other victims—such as the Gypsies? Would it be right to invest vast sums in this site, and how central should it be? To what extent should its presence loom over an image of the united city? How can such a site be integrated into the city's vigorous life? How much urban vitality and tumult will be allowed within it, and how will it be possible to prevent defacement and Nazi graffiti which will create the opposite effect? This

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

last concern takes on special importance in light of the startling growth in the desecration of Jewish cemeteries in Germany in recent years.

The site has now been approved by the German parliament, and is about to enter the critical stages of moving from planning to construction. When Professor Jäckel and Mrs. Leah Rosch, two advocates of the site in Berlin, visited Israel, they asked to meet with Israeli journalists—apparently hoping for unambiguous support. But their request arouses a faint smile: it testifies to a complete misunderstanding of the public debate in Israel, and in particular in the Israeli media. The hosts—the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Israel—found out that the number of Israeli journalists interested in the subject can be counted on the fingers of one hand. A commemorative site in Berlin, however important to the German public, may perhaps derive its inspiration from Yad Vashem, but will always remain foreign to Israelis.

Yad Vashem is not only a place of commemoration: it also comprises an archive, a publishing house, and an international center for Holocaust studies. And most Israelis are familiar with its museum—visiting it is part of the Israeli "rite of passage." All young Israelis have probably visited the museum at least once—while at high school or as part of their army service. When they left the museum, they certainly remembered with utmost clarity the identity of the victims, as well as the identity of the murderers, the Germans. But whether these murderers were the SS, members of the Einsatzgruppen, units of other nationalities who were called upon to collaborate with the Nazis, or the Wehrmacht is of no special significance to the Israeli observer who is not a historian. He or she would probably be amazed to discover their identity and to realize how important these questions are to the German public.

The traveling exhibition documenting the crimes of the Wehrmacht, which was initiated by the Hamburg Institut für Sozialforschung in 1995, caused a real commotion in Germany. The active involvement of Wehrmacht soldiers in the murder of civilians, a phenomenon known in studies of Nazism for at least fifteen years, took on a completely different meaning in photographic documentation. The pictures confronted the general German public with the inescapable recognition of the fact that the Wehrmacht was also involved in the Nazi murders, and cannot be considered a "clean" domain—an army like any other army, committed to a military ethic, and fighting other armies, not a civilian population. The exhibition was tantamount to slaughtering the German sacred cow. And, when the exhibition was about to travel to New York, Bogdan Musial, a historian, argued convincingly in an academic article that eleven of the exhibition's total of 1,433 photographs did not document

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

murders carried out by the Wehrmacht, but murders carried out by the Russians in 1941 during their hasty withdrawal. There is also some doubt over the cataloging of other photographs. The organizers of the exhibition were forced to delay its departure for New York, choosing to convene a committee of senior historians to reexamine the findings, and to restore credibility to the exhibition.

I believe that the Israeli observer faces two primary difficulties in understanding the significance of the controversy. The "sensation" at the exhibition, the fact that it sheds doubt on the Wehrmacht's purity, has no effect since Israelis attach no particular importance to differences between Nazi Germany's various military and party formations. But Israelis are also left indifferent to what undermines the exhibition's credibility. Some eleven photographs out of a total of 1,433 are quite incapable of undermining its credibility, because to the Israelis the Wehrmacht is not a sacred cow, and the average Israeli is not surprised by the Wehrmacht's involvement in extermination operations. The knowledge that the Soviets also murdered civilians is central to the ongoing German and European public debate, made up of different tendencies in contemporary antitotalitarian criticism, which is trying to highlight the manifest similarity between Nazism and Communism while exposing the extent of Soviet destructiveness. Just as *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression* is not central to the public debate in Israel, so eleven photographs, however criminal, are unable to arouse a public debate in a society whose key issues are so completely different.

There are a number of interpretations for this difference. The first, inescapable, interpretation concerns the question of relevance. All of the debates referred to here relate to Germany's past. As a result, they constitute a cornerstone in the shaping of German identity. The debates which concern most Israelis revolve round the past, identity, and the existence of Israel. These experiences—the German one and its Israeli counterpart—are not complementary to each other, and sometimes are not even antitheses: they are mutually alien experiences. These utterly simple matters are a bit more complex because they expose the growing gap between Israeli interest in the Holocaust, and the fact that the reality in which the Holocaust took place is slipping away from Israelis' understanding. In order to comprehend the Holocaust, it is not sufficient to be familiar with Jewish history. There is a need to understand Europe, including its traditions—high and low. Israel has become very remote from Europe. This is not a critical lament of Israel's oriental character. I am simply arguing that Israeli "rejection of the Diaspora"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

has succeeded beyond all expectations. Israelis are utterly involved with Israeli realities, which are bound up in their native soil; and their contact with European controversies is mediated through the Hebrew language. The problem of language becomes the primary obstacle for the interested audience. When Zionists in the past rejected the Diaspora, they did so as *olim*, as immigrants—new and old—and as products of Europe. Most of them had a command of a number of languages. The new Israeli is not multilingual.

Public debate is nourished by the academic community, cultural figures, politicians, and interested members of the general public. In Germany, the public debate is borne on the shoulders of that stratum known as the *Bildungsbürgertum*, i.e., the educated middle classes. Among this class, general education, i.e., that which is not rewarded or compensated, is not directly related to a profession and is not an immediate resource, but a status symbol. In Israel, during and for a while after the pre-State period of the Yishuv, there existed similar models along the lines of the Eastern European Jewish intelligentsia. But the further Israel moves away from Europe, the greater the distance between these models and the country's current situation. A comparison of the scope of Russian-language newspapers and magazines in Israel, which serve less than a million emigrants from the former Soviet Union, with equivalent activities in a majority Israeli society, speaks more eloquently than anything else about this phenomenon. In the current, highly charged, dominant political reality, with the absence of a broad-based intellectual tradition, and the lack of mastery of European languages, it is extremely difficult to look over the fence. And perhaps, above all, this is due to the power of time which, despite all the rhetoric, distances and dulls the horrors of the Holocaust, turning Germany and its debates, despite all the declarations, into just another place three-and-a-half-hours' flying time from Ben-Gurion Airport.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

AMOS OZ

From *The Same Sea*

A cat

Not far from the sea, Mr. Albert Danon
lives in Amirim Street, alone. He is fond
of olives and feta; a mild accountant, he lost
his wife not long ago. Nadia Danon died one morning
of ovarian cancer, leaving some clothes,
a dressing table, some finely embroidered
place mats. Their only son, Enrico David,
has gone off mountaineering in Tibet.

Here in Bat Yam the summer morning is hot and clammy
but on those mountains night is falling. Mist
is swirling low in the ravines. A needle-sharp wind
howls as though alive, and the fading light
looks more and more like a nasty dream.

At this point the path forks:
One way is steep, the other gently sloping.
Not a trace on the map of the fork in the path.
And as the evening darkens and the wind lashes him
with sharp hailstones, Rico has to guess
whether to take the shorter or the easier way down.

Either way, Mr. Danon will get up now
and switch off his computer. He will go
and stand by the window. Outside in the yard
on the wall is a cat. It has spotted a lizard. It will not let go.

Editor's Note: Excerpted from *The Same Sea* by Amos Oz. Translated from the Hebrew by Nicholas de Lange in collaboration with the author. To be published October 12, 2001 by Harcourt, Inc. Copyright © 1999 by Amos Oz. Translation copyright © 2001 by Nicholas de Lange. All rights reserved.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

•••

A bird

Nadia Danon. Not long before she died a bird
on a branch woke her.
At four in the morning, before it was light, *narimi*
narimi said the bird.

What will I be when I'm dead? A sound or a scent
or neither. I've started a mat.
I may still finish it. Dr. Pinto
is optimistic: the situation is stable. The left one
is a little less good. The right one is fine. The X-rays are clear. See
for yourself: no secondaries here.

At four in the morning, before it is light, Nadia Danon
begins to remember. Ewes' milk cheese. A glass of wine.
A bunch of grapes. A scent of slow evening on the Cretan hills,
the taste of cold water, the whispering of pines, the shadow
of the mountains spreading over the plain, *narimi*
narimi the bird sang there. I'll sit here and sew.
I'll be finished by morning.

•••

Butterflies to a tortoise

At sixteen and a half, in a country town, she was married to a well-
off relative.
A widower aged thirty. It was the custom
to marry daughters within the family. Her father
was a gold- and silversmith. One of the brothers was sent to Sofia,
to study to be a pharmacist and bring back a diploma. Nadia herself
learned from her mother how to cook and embroider,
make sweetmeats and write neatly. The widowed bridegroom, a draper,
came to visit on Sabbaths and holidays. If asked, he sang wonderfully
in a rich, resonant tenor voice. He was a tall, elegant, well-mannered man,
who always knew what to say

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and what to pass over in silence. Nadia's heart
was not in the marriage, because her best friend whispered to her
what love was really like: it must not be stirred until it pleases.

But her parents, patiently, understandingly, brought her to another
point of view. Surely to do her duty was also in her own best interest.
And they set
a date, not too soon; they wanted to give her enough time
to become accustomed gradually to the widower, who never failed
to bring her a present. Sabbath by Sabbath
she learned to like the sound of his voice. Which was pleasant.

After the wedding her husband turned out to be a considerate man
who inclined to a measure of regularity in intimate matters. Every
evening, scrubbed, scented and cheerful, he would come and sit on the
edge
of the bed. He started with a gentle word of affection, turned out the
light
to spare her blushes, drew aside the sheet, caressed her sparingly,
and eventually rested his hand on her breast. She was always
on her back, her nightdress rolled up, he was always on top of her,
while outside the door the pendulum wall-clock with gilt fittings
slowly beat time. He rammed. He groaned. Had she wished, every night
she could have counted about twenty moderate thrusts, the final one
reinforced with a tenor note. Then he wrapped himself up and slept.
In the thick darkness she lay empty and bewildered
for another hour at least. Sometimes solacing her body herself. In a
whisper
she told her closest friend, who would say, When there is love
it feels different, but how can you explain butterflies to a tortoise.

Several times she woke at five, put on a housecoat and went up on the
roof
to fetch in the washing. She could see empty rooftops, a patch of forest,
a deserted plain. Then her father and her husband, setting off together
to early-morning prayers. Day after day she shopped and cleaned
and cooked. On Sabbath eves guests came, imbibed and dined
and nibbled and argued. On her back in bed when it was all over
she sometimes had thoughts about a baby.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

•••

The story goes like this

After about three years it became clear that she could not give him children either. The widower, sadly, divorced her and married her cousin instead. Because of the shame and grief she was suffering her parents gave her permission to join her brother and sister-in-law who had settled in Israel, and live there under their supervision. Her brother rented a room for her on the roof of a building in Bat Yam and arranged for her to work in a sewing shop. The money she had received from the divorce he deposited in a savings account for her. And so, at the age of twenty, she was a single girl again. She enjoyed being on her own for much of the time. Her brother and his wife kept an eye on her, but in fact it was unnecessary. Sometimes she baby-sat for them in the evening and sometimes she went out with somebody or other to a café or the cinema, without getting involved. She was not attracted by the thought of being put on her back again with her nightdress rolled up; and she could easily keep her own body quiet. At work she was considered a serious, responsible worker and in general a lovely girl. One night she happened to go to the cinema with a quiet, sensible young man, an accountant who was distantly related to her sister-in-law. When he escorted her home he apologized for not flirting with her; it wasn't because he didn't find her attractive, heaven forbid, but, on the contrary, because he didn't know how to go about it. In the past some girls had made fun of him for this, he explained, and he even laughed at himself a little, but it was the plain truth. When he said this, she suddenly felt a sort of pleasant inner roughness at the nape of her neck in the roots of her hair that radiated warmth towards her shoulders and armpits, which is why she suggested, Let's meet again on Tuesday at eight o'clock. Almost joyfully Albert said: I'd like that.

•••

The miracle of the loaves and the fishes

There was also sex for money. It happened in a low-roofed
backpackers' hostel in Kathmandu. She had a dark voice like a muffled
bell,
not unlike a fado-singer's bitter wistfulness. She was a tall,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

well-rounded woman from Portugal who had been thrown out of a convent
on account of temptation (which she had both committed and succumbed to).
The Saviour had forgiven her. Her trespasses were themselves
her penance and her penitence. Now she took in wayfarers for a modest
charge. Her name was Maria. She spoke some English. She was not young,
her makeup was thick, but her knees were shapely and her breasts
unrestrained. In the tender furrow that crossed the neckline of her dress
a pendant hung, two fine silver lines running down till they met at a cross
that appeared and disappeared and reappeared
at the opening of her dress whenever she moved or laughed or bent over.
The L-shaped room contained only some mattresses, a low cupboard,
a washbasin, an earthenware jug, some tin mugs. The four Dutchmen,
Thomas, Johan, Wim and Paul, drank a strange, sluggish beer
brewed locally from a mountain shrub known as monkey marrow. Rico
sipped it curiously: it was tepid, thick and rather bitter.

For a modest fee she would grant them "grace and favor" in her room. One
at a time, twenty minutes each. Or else all five of them at once,
at a discount. She had a weakness for really young, woman-hungry men
coming down off the mountains: they always gave her such a soft,
maternal feeling. For all she cared they could see her at work. Let them
watch, it would be more exciting. For them and for her. She guessed
at the pent-up rivers of desire accumulated by mountain climbers
up there, in the empty snowfields and stark valleys. There were five of them
and she was a woman, and their desperation
made her feel compassionate too. Now you, come close and just touch me
here, then back off. Now you. Now wait. Watch.

She took off her dress slowly, swaying her hips, her eyes lowered, as though
to some sacred chant inaudible to them. The little green cross
hanging on her chest quivered on its silver thread, caressed by her breasts.
Paul snickered. At once she covered up with both hands: no.
This would not do. She insisted: no laughing. Anyone who had come here
to mock could have his money back and go elsewhere. Here
everything was decent and unsullied; there was room for aching bodies
but not for filthy minds. This evening she had a yen for a wedding night:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

she would bestow her favors on every groom, then lull them to sleep
on her belly, a she-wolf with her cubs. Just as the Christ
gave His body and His blood—
so she went on, until Thomas and Johan, on either side, sealed her lips.

Rico was last, feeling for her warm soft conch and missing. Her hands
slid down and guided him. He lingered inside for an eternity,
holding back, not thrusting, mastering the surge lest it end
like a fleeting dream. Wherefore the woman Maria was filled with tenderness
as waters cover the sea. As though seized with labor pains,
she clenched him lightly, with descending and ascending contractions:
suckling him and being suckled to the very last.

• • •

Refuge

Dita is at the door. On her slender back a mountain of a backpack
with another bundle tied to it, clutching some plastic bags
and a handbag: she is seeking refuge, for a couple of days,
a week at most, if it's not an imposition. She's ended up with no flat
and no money, all her savings and everything gone; she found
some kind of producer, got taken for a ride. But why are you standing
in the doorway? You'll fall over. Come inside. Then you can
tell me all about it. We'll have a think. We'll get you out of this mess.

She gulped down a soft drink. Undressed. Took a shower. For a moment
she embarrassed him when she emerged wrapped in a towel from mid-breast
to thigh. She stood in front of him
in the kitchen and told him in detail how she had got stung.
And her parents were abroad and their flat was let, she had simply nowhere
to turn. It was no good his staring down at the floor:
the sight of her naked feet
sets his heart at odds with his body.

Rico's room is yours from now on. It's empty
anyway. Here is the bedding. That's the air-conditioning. His wardrobe isn't
too tidy, but there's some room. I'll bring you a cold drink in a minute.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Lie down. Get some rest. We'll talk later. If you need me for anything
just say Albert and I'll be right there. Don't be shy. Or simply come
to my office. It's through there. I'll just be sitting finishing off some
accounts.
You're no trouble at all. On the contrary: for some time now—
He stopped himself. Under the towel her hips made a whispering sound
and he was blushing as though he had been caught red-handed.

• • •

In the light-groping darkness

A widowed father with an honest name
lies wide awake in the night consumed with shame:
a sleeping woman the cause of his pain.

She's there alone—his eyes are open wide—
next door she's lying naked, on her side.
So young. A child. My daughter, my bride!

He switches on the bedside light and blinks
at his son and wife on the sideboard. He thinks
for a while. Then pads to the kitchen and drinks.

He sits down at his desk and begins to dream
heavy thoughts: his shadow stares back from the screen.
What a difficult summer, he types, this has been.

From the garden outside where nothing has stirred
in the light-groping darkness, a single bird:
narimi narimi. Yes, I heard.

Restless he stands: how he longs to spread
a blanket on her, and stroke her head.
He stifles these feelings, and goes back to bed.

He turns and tosses. Of sleep there's no sign.
He turns on the light and checks the time:
it's five o'clock here—so in Tibet it's nine.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

•••

David according to Dita

How the day has faded. When were we talking about King David,
how did we get to talking about him? Do you remember, Dita? One
Friday
night at Giggy Ben-Gal's in Melchett Street. You dragged me out of the
party
onto the balcony and at the window opposite a beefy man wearing nothing
but an undershirt and his loneliness was polishing his glasses
against the light, he put them on, saw us watching and shut
his shutters. And then because of him you told me what it is
about a man that attracts you: the Charles Aznavour type, or Yevgeny
Yevtushenko. From them you went on to King David. It attracts
you when there is a needy side, a rascally side and a side
that plays the fool. And you also showed me from the balcony that night
what a ragged sexy city this Tel Aviv is.
You don't see a sunset or a star, you see how the plaster
peels from an excess of adrenaline smells of sweat and diesel fuel, a tired
city that doesn't want to sleep at the end of the day it wants to go out
wants it
to happen wants it to end and then wants more. But David, you said,
reigned for thirty years in Jerusalem the ultra-Orthodox City of David
which he could not stand and which could not stand him
with his leaping and dancing and his one-night stands.
It would have been more fitting for him to reign in Tel Aviv,
to roam the city like a General (Retd.) who is both a grieving parent
and a well-known philanderer, a loaded high-liver and a king
who composes music and writes poetry and sometimes gives a recital,
"The Sweet Psalmist," in a trendy venue then goes
off to the pub to drink with young fans and groupies.

•••

She comes to him but he is busy

She has made him some tea and brought him some crackers and olives
and goat cheese on a tray and now here she is barefoot in the doorway
of his room, feeling partly like a daughter and partly like a waitress,
waiting for him to turn his tired head. But he has not noticed. He

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

is hunched over a document, absorbed in checking the details
of the rotten agreement she has so incautiously signed. She has been
taken for a ride. She had such high hopes. He finds that all she gets
in return for the money is not a commitment but, at best, only
a conditional intent. It is a contemptible contract, yet so full of holes
that even without lawyers there is a fair chance of rescuing her
and putting pressure on him to pay back the money.

Barefoot with her tray she waits for him to notice her. If she calls him
he will start and his voice will tremble. Yesterday evening she said Albert
and he jumped, almost shuddered. What will happen if she touches
his hand, not like a woman but like a child asking
When are you going to stop being busy?

He glances at his watch: ten to five. Ten to nine out in Nepal. He'll
pay it back, and how: we'll scare him. At the meeting
tomorrow we'll point out, here and here, how we'll nail him if he tries
to get clever. On the other hand, if he admits his errors and makes amends,
our side may consider taking no further action on this occasion.

While he is still making notes, the tray arrives with the touch of her hand,
not like a daughter but like a bold schoolgirl, deliberately
teasing a middle-aged teacher who is shy but endearing.

• • •

Desire

His father is waiting and so is his mother and Dita is with them
in a strange shack and the woman Maria and the mountain shadows
and the roar of the sea and David and Michal and Jonathan too,
and there is no limit to their passionate longing many waters cannot
quench
and mighty rivers cannot drown. See, he is returning to them filled.

• • •

He resembles

It would be interesting to know what she is thinking about now, what
is the source of that secret smile, like a drowsy, satisfied cat. She is

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

remembering a morning of love in a hotel in Eilat in the springtime. She didn't feel like a swim and she didn't feel like getting up. They stayed in bed with the air-conditioning on, sated with night games, she in half a bikini and he stark naked, their skin still pink and hot from the beach yesterday. Breakfast in bed and a game of rummy, laughing at nothing at all, looking for a rhyme for stowaway. Throwaway. Go away. I stow away, you stowed away, he has stown away. Then, with pencil and paper, listing palindromes. Collapsing with laughter at this too. Noon. Boob. Poop. Toot. (As in, toot if you've pooped.) Whoever found a new word could demand a forfeit. In the course of this game Dita discovered something she had never noticed before, that Rico could write with either hand. I've never seen anything like that before; let's see now if you can write with your toes. He tried and scribbled and made her laugh. He explained that he was not born ambidextrous, he was actually born left-handed, but his parents made him write with his right hand and even punished him if he didn't. Especially his mother, because where she came from left-handedness was considered a handicap, a sign of poor upbringing, the mark of a bad family background. They forced me to be right-handed, and the result is that now I can write with either.

She took them both and placed them here and here, let's see which of them is more left-handed. They ended up playing at deflowering the virgin and seducing the monk, until they fell asleep. Later they showered and went down, famished, to look for a fish restaurant. In the evening they went for a swim. Now, remembering, she wanted him. She went to a film with Giggy Ben-Gal and they ate in a pub, and then went back to his place. When she got back it was nearly one o'clock, but she found the old man waiting up for her. Was he worried? Was he jealous? He made her a snack which she didn't eat because she wasn't hungry. But she sat in the kitchen with him for half an hour and he told her something about how drab life was in those days and even a little, in passing, about Rico's mother. Finally, filled with nocturnal courage, he revealed to her that he had a girlfriend, not exactly a girlfriend, a lady friend, who worked in the Property Tax Board, not a lady friend either really but an undefined sort of relationship. Dita was curious to know whether he had touched his "undefined relationship" yet, but she didn't feel she could ask. Interesting, why did he tell me? It came out as though he was writing a word, rubbing it out, and writing another one on top of it, and that reminded her of his son. And his way of putting his hand between his collar and his neck sometimes for no reason at all, or explaining things as though he were threading beads. Is he left-handed

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

too, but still in the closet? Such a sensitive man. So sweet. I wonder when he ever sleeps.

• • •

A postcard from Thimphu

Dear Dad and Dita. We were cut off yesterday while we were talking. I didn't
manage to tell you how pleased I am the two of you are together at home.
It's good that you're not alone either of you. It's a good solution for you both.
You look after her and you look after him, etc. Cooking and eating
and washing up and taking turns emptying the rubbish. I like this
father-daughter couple thing, this two-track relationship, as if you've gained
a daughter Dad and Mother and I have gained a double. Dad, I expect
you're the one who puts both your laundry in the machine, not sorting it
into his and hers but only into cotton and synthetics. And Dita, I imagine
you're the one who does the shopping for both of you and Dad you make
one of your salads, no mortal hand can chop vegetables finer than you. So
you've ended up with no money and no flat Dita, well Dad, you'll sort
that out for her. And as Mother used to say, every cloud has a silver lining,
and in this case the lining is also fun. Dita I can almost see you sleeping in
my bed, where Dad you come in every night as usual to cover her up, but
Dita you push and kick the covers off again. An anarchist in your sleep.
The opposite of Mother, who even on summer nights wrapped herself up
like a mummy. She wore a blue nightie trimmed with lace. You ought to
ask him if you can wear it one night. You won't refuse her, will you?
It's on the top shelf of the wardrobe, on the left. The little that Mother needs
now she can find with me: she, who could never stand long journeys, who
could never sleep in a strange bed, comes all the way here sometimes,
and naturally I don't tell her to go away.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

EMIL DRAITSER

Faithful Masha

A WRITER WAS TRAVELING. With last minute permission from the Soviet Writers' Union, he had left his native Moscow for America. He had been to the States before, to New York and Chicago. This time he came to see what life was like in one of the most intriguing corners of the country, Southern California.

He was old. His hands shook. It happened that he had to dictate more and more to his wife and that troubled him. Yet they had lived together for a long time, a lifetime, in fact. Masha had been the perfect companion for him, an invisible wife, a rarity in these emancipated times. Still, writing is a private affair, where one's own hand is important. But what can one do when it hardly obeys anymore? His wife had begun to listen at night to his breathing, she was afraid he might suddenly die. During the day when he took a nap, she found excuses to peek in and see how he was doing. His son, unloved by him, was much like himself in his youth—the same plain face with eyelids that seemed glued at the corners, the same receding chin, reddish nose, and piping, abrupt speech. He had already been given charge of their household. Yes, he was a loafer too, but nothing could be done about it. Forty years old, some faded women for a week or two. He didn't want to think about his son.

The snobs in the Writers' Union put him up at the Bonaventura, a four-star hotel. Of course, they did it not out of respect for him, but to impress the Americans. "Get a load of us! We're also a big and mighty country!" Mighty, my ass. A country of mice, mud, and puddles. He had recently made a short trip from Moscow to Volokolamsk, some hundred miles north of the capital. He stepped off the train and found himself knee-deep in mud. For the last three hundred years civilization had ignored this god-forsaken town with its old, tumbledown monastery, dark-roofed huts, and stray goats wandering its narrow, dirty streets. The whole country is just one big Potemkin village defended with nuclear warheads.

Idiots! Why the hell did he need this fancy room? There wasn't even a McDonald's nearby, or any other place to get a cheap meal, the only one he could afford on their miserable daily allowance. The Bonaventura Hotel! Fountains on the ground floor. Elevators speeding through glass cylinders like pistons, making him nauseous. Why all this fuss?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Was he a fur dealer or an oil tycoon? Only he knew that he was really an embroiderer, one who fashions plots on a tambour, and how happy it made him if, after enormous efforts, he managed to unburden himself of one plot, then another. But soon new ones would pop up out of nowhere and jump on his back.

The writer was not in the habit of leaving his suitcases unpacked and rushing off into the city. He spent the morning getting settled in the hotel. He realized long ago that a room, like a human being, needs to be honored, however briefly, with one's presence. It doesn't like being treated like a mere thing. Otherwise, in revenge, it will inflict bumps and bruises with its corners and radiators, sticking them in the way when one is least aware.

He sat awhile on the bed, touched the bedspread, and sniffed the air. My sense of smell is already failing, he thought. There wasn't any special scent here, except perhaps that of an artificial rose. American hotels don't smell at all like human dwellings; that butterfly chaser was right. He picked up the little bible, put out by indefatigable Gideons throughout the country. He looked at its thickness, its unmarked cover. Protestant people read little—the book had been bent open in only one place.

Masha was also there, at the edge of the bed. She, a gentle soul, knew his ways and did not hurry him. Yet he was sure she was longing to run off to some outlet to look over the dresses. She's a woman after all. Oh, what a woman she was when they first met. "Masha, Masha, it's good that you are not someone else's, but ours," as the Russian song goes. And she was still a beauty. Light blue eyes, tender white face with little maddening dimples on her cheeks. She fingers the kerchief on her neck, tries to push away a little cloud of gray hair near her eyes. It's okay, let's sit awhile, and then go.

He was driven around town. He was bored by this empty settlement, vast like the Russian steppe and just as desolate. A truly large city, but without people on the streets, only cars and in them apparitions. He was bored with the palms, the many-floored hotels like upright matchboxes, and the freeways.

Somewhere downtown he got out for a stretch. There was nothing much to look at. There was as much taste here as at the market square in Serpukhov, a provincial town, only less dust perhaps. The mechanical watering hoses shot volleys of water at the close-cropped grass. (Is it possible they are synthetic, those damned modern lawns, and the water is for show after all?) But life here is also like an empty husk. Maybe the people do look a little more cheerful. And their step, too, is livelier than ours. A young black woman chiseled from dark warm bone, her skin gleaming in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the sunlight, suddenly walked in front of him. He was overjoyed, because despite his failing sense of smell, he caught the light scent of her skin. She got into a blood-red car sleek as a cigarette case, and was immediately sucked into freeway traffic. He smiled at his own roguish thoughts. If he were younger and stronger, he would go after such a woman. But what about Masha? How could he live without her? And right away he called softly, Masha. She patted his hand. I'm here, I'm here.

Her maternal patting always calmed him. The way she touched him now—slowly, almost indifferently—made him realize she had guessed his thoughts again and was a little angry, jealous, and reproachful. Yes, look at you, a little old man, see how you've lost yourself in silly daydreams.

He relaxed in the hotel room, lying on the bedspread, right over the enormous monogrammed initials of the hotel owner. What colossal vanity. They lay side by side, he and Masha. It was always this way, together, half a century. Dear Masha, faithful Masha. She was breathing easily with her eyes shut, just dozing. Oh Masha, Masha, a writer's wife. He had known for a long time how lucky he was.

What meant most to him was when it came to his work she never tried to just please him. As soon as he'd finish his best draft, he'd hand it to her. As he paced their apartment, staring with unseeing eyes into all the forgotten nooks, she'd go to her room, read his manuscript, then come out and say I'm sorry, Slava, but you're capable of better than that. This needs more work, and you know it.

He'd grumble a bit, but he always knew in his gut that she was right. He'd throw his manuscript into the garbage and start anew. He'd rewrite it over and over until she'd appear at the door of her room clutching her glasses in her tiny fist (he was often struck by nature's ability to create something so fragile) and, smiling radiantly, say You did it, Slava! This time, you did it. Let's send it to press. Where can you get such a treasure of a woman nowadays? Nowhere. They're extinct. It's certainly impossible to find one among those modern women so taken up with a career of their own that they give up a family. No wonder every other marriage ends in divorce. Only people who need each other, whatever the reason, stay together. It's that simple. He had seen many useless women around, among his son's girlfriends, bored and dissatisfied with their lives. Oh, he himself is a lucky dog, no question about it.

How many of those so-called writers' wives had he known in his lifetime? It's enough to recall Tina, his first wife, and the grief her demands for constant attention gave him. She couldn't get it through her head that an artist worthy of the name has one and only one true love. The object of his obsession is inside himself—it's the blood and beat of his own

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

heart. He'd completely forgotten what she looked like. Only at times in his son's face something of his mother would show through, a fox's grin.

The next evening he was driven to a summerhouse in the mountains for a reception in his honor given by the professor who had invited him to America. That day, after lunch, he lectured on "The Current State of Contemporary Soviet Literature." He spoke slowly, smirking inwardly at the incurable naïveté of Americans. Was he so dumb as to say what he really thinks about current Soviet literary pulp? Can't these well-meaning, simple-minded Yankees figure out once and for all what his country is all about? Don't they know that in his ridiculous homeland the bastards who are put in place to order him around never sleep? Every schoolboy in Russia understands that, as a writer, his every word abroad is reported back home, dutifully typed and spread out on the polished dark-wood desk in front of Comrade Potapov, the same fat-faced KGB watchdog at the Writers' Union who authorized spending precious dollars for his American trip. It's not easy even for a writer of his stature to get permission for a trip to the West. Was he his own worst enemy? Did they expect him to turn into a "politically unreliable," stripped of the right to go abroad? God Almighty, save America from her own stupidity.

He sensed that Masha also sighed and smiled. She read his mind. Those Americans. Those kids that have trouble growing up.

Well, now it was over, all that public bullshit. Nothing to worry about. He had given them what they could easily read in *Pravda*—a few stock phrases from the Party line. It was the last night before going home. The writer entered the living room. Thank God there weren't too many people there, mostly graduate students and a few young teachers. He easily tired of a crowd. It was obvious that the group was uncomfortable speaking Russian with him, afraid of making fools of themselves and so they kept quiet, just smiling as is expected in the West. Putting up with a man standing next to you who doesn't talk is possible only if he radiates cordiality. Otherwise it's deadly.

The professor's face was tense. It's a serious business to feed guests. He shuttled between the kitchen and the balcony, where he was grilling some exotic fish. The balcony opened out onto a mountain, overgrown with low bushes. The writer got worried. Would his stomach tolerate that sea stuff? Masha patted his hand, understanding his anxiety. It's fine for him, he would just have to be careful, not swallow it right away, and chew on it a bit longer.

The writer sat alone on the couch, the graduate students, hesitating, evidently composing sentences and gathering courage to speak with this famous guest.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The core of his art was Russian; for him the language was sacred. He regarded with suspicion and jealousy those who could only desecrate it, no matter what the intentions. Why are so many people who study Russian so homely, the writer mused, feeling almost offended. Anyone who reconnoiters in a foreign language has to be a cutthroat. I can understand the host, a former boxer, but what about that girl with the delicate hands and sunken cheeks sprinkled with huge freckles. What's in it for her?

They began to gather quietly around a coffee table on which the host had set out paper plates with food, soda, and a few bottles of California chardonnay. To please his guest of honor, the professor took out a bottle of Stolichnaya from the freezer. The guests stood around waiting for their turn to get to the table. There was neither that animation, nor that special, uplifting mood that accompanies Russian parties. There was no clinking of glasses—here they were plastic, and the writer couldn't stand the feel of the material on his lips. Back home, with good food and especially good vodka on the table, the Russians say their souls rejoice. Indeed they do! When there's a party in Russia, it's a celebration of life. Here it's a mere ritual of eating. What kind of party can it be without joy!

Having cooked the meal, the professor came over to keep him company. Carefully, trying not to make his esteemed guest uneasy, he asked if he wouldn't mind meeting one of his former countrymen, a young writer, Anatoly, who had been eased out of Russia a year ago, and now was a graduate student in their department.

Oh, yes, of course, the guest didn't mind. He had heard that Anatoly was somewhere in this part of the country. In fact, he spotted him in the audience during the lecture. Now Anatoly stood behind the host's back, waiting for his turn to be introduced. The writer immediately took stock of him. He had hardly changed from the time of their gatherings at the Writers' House on Alexey Tolstoy Street. Same leather jacket, worn at the elbows, his hands in his pockets, thumbs sticking out.

So, how are you, young man? the writer asked.

Very well, thank you, Anatoly retorted, though the writer hadn't meant to be sarcastic.

What are you doing at a graduate school? You're a writer, not a scholar.

I'm studying. I'll get a position eventually. After my Ph.D. It's not going to be easy. But then nobody will tell me what I should write about and how. No need to sell my soul to the devil, he said with a forced chuckle.

Well, the writer remarked, don't delude yourself, young man. A writer anywhere is not quite free. They find you one way or another. What about the dollar? Did it get hold of you already? Do you still write?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

As a matter of fact, I do. Mostly for the papers though. No time for real work yet.

So, do you write against us? the writer asked, laughing pointedly. The whole situation amused him.

Well, that depends on who you mean by "us," Anatoly grinned. If you mean our rotten system, then of course I do. Hasn't it always been a Russian writer's civic duty to equate the pen with the bayonet? he added defiantly.

Civic duty, my foot, the writer thought, cringing at Anatoly's words. He decided not to let himself get pulled into an argument. He didn't give a broken kopeck for all that crap they've been loading on a writer's shoulders for so long. They made even Pushkin out to be a fighter for the oppressed, Pushkin who wrote to his friends that to free the serfs in a barbaric country like Russia would spell disaster for the whole nation. Didn't he turn out to be right, after all? Wasn't Russia still reeling from that event? Then again, did anything of the "civic duty" stuff survive the very day it was created? Does anyone read that boring Gleb Uspensky anymore or any other writer who joined up for the public good?

The day was long. The writer was tired, and he closed his eyes. He didn't feel like arguing with Anatoly, a kid on whose lips his mother's milk hadn't dried yet. How could he understand what it meant to survive as a writer in his country? Big deal, they took apart the typeset of his first novel that was ready for printing. That's nothing. What Anatoly went through can't compare with my struggles. Let it go Slava. Don't let it get to you, Masha whispered in his ear. Remember your heart. Did you take your pill this afternoon? He's too young, that Anatoly, to understand.

It was nice to see you, the writer said dryly, opening his eyes. He liked Anatoly; back in Russia he had thought him very promising, but he didn't want any complications from being too friendly with an émigré. Anatoly stepped aside so others could speak with the guest of honor.

They came by turns. They were polite and courteous, but the writer saw clearly that they were trying to conceal their true feelings. He knew that although he was known in the West, at least to Slavicists, it was not without a certain notoriety. He had never defended himself publicly. If thoughts about a poor reputation became too oppressive, he kept them to himself. Now, recalling Anatoly's not-too-friendly look, he smiled inwardly. He knew exactly what they were saying about him behind his back: he's aligned himself with the regime. Yes, he had written that trashy little novel that glorified Soviet power. And the authorities had swallowed every bit of it.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He had long observed that there's no such thing as too great a compliment. It's true not only for women, but for the Party bosses as well, who ate it up. They devoured every letter of the crap he wrote in two weeks. He was disgusted with himself and the literary soufflé he had cooked up for them. They weren't even bothered by the lack of subtlety in the title *Hail the Soviets*!, the fools.

How voraciously his liberal friends sank their teeth into this work! You got it right, my confreres! Don't have any doubts about it. A tsar or some other dictator—it's all the same to me. My whole life is lived within ten inches—from the tip of my nose to the tip of my pen. It's high time you understood this. We're a terrifying breed—carnivores, cannibals. We have no mercy even towards our own wives, sacrificing them to the Moloch of the Word. What kind of woman understands and accepts this? The most rare, the incomparable. Someone like Masha. True, Masha?

She didn't answer, just smiled gently. Only Masha had such a smile. She brushed a crumb from the lapel of his jacket.

Pandering to the authorities. It doesn't enter my colleagues' stubborn heads that they live by exactly the same cannibalistic principle as the system they despise: "He who is not with us is against us." What about compromise? The whole Western world would have fallen apart long ago if not for that principle. It's only in my adolescent Russia that "compromise" is a dirty word.

"He compromised his conscience. What a shame!" I spit on all these big words. My passion is greater, stronger than I am, and I will be judged not on what I've said, but on the best I've written. It was the right thing to do—to write that novel. It brought me the State Prize in Literature and that piece of tin, the Order of Glorious Labor. Of course, it wasn't the money and state honors I was after. I got myself something more precious—they left me in peace to do my true work. Otherwise I would never have been able to see that novel about the Civil War in print. Those years forever scarred my memory with their blood and destruction of all that was truly dear to me—my youth, my tender and gracious world that the revolution consumed. I couldn't help but write that novel. I had to get it out of my system.

When I brought the manuscript to the publisher, they jumped at the chance to please me, a decorated writer, to find a way to get my work through their very own censors. And they did it! They prefaced it with a long article instructing the reader on how best to interpret it.

So, I'm re-pug-nant, he stretched out the word almost voluptuously. I'm rot-ten. I don't defend my fellow writers. Ha-ha! No! N-o. They don't exist, there's no such thing as a fellow writer. There's only myself,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and everything around me is only as I see it. If one doesn't believe in this, then there's no reason to sit down at a desk. If a "fellow writer" sees differently, then he's mis-ta-ken. The world is only the way I see it. On this point you can stretch me on the rack, break my bones—I will not recant. I will not recant. . .I have had my share of suffering. I've been slandered and maligned unfairly. Women have left me. Back in the twenties, I was even tortured once by mistake. All the same, my suffering has been a blessing. A difficult life is a true one. What would I be without my torments? Nothing and no one.

They served fruit. He picked an exotic, hairy piece with a thin skin, odorous, and rather sour tasting. He chose it not so much for its appearance as for its bird name—"kiwi." After dinner and wine, the graduate students gathered their courage and spoke more boldly. Clearly, some were able and worth a conversation, but despite his considerable ambition, he didn't like to talk about his own work.

The only thing he knew for sure was that each morning in the predawn light, he would sit by the window of his little study like a maiden at a spinning wheel. The spindle would hum, jump about, and burn the skin of his palms. The coarse fiber with its raw edges would twist forward from somewhere beyond, jerking along unevenly. At one moment a knot would hit unexpectedly at his fingers, at another an empty hemp shell would suddenly cut his fingertips. But when he was lucky, it would push forward with all its force.

He knows exactly where the fiber comes from—Moscow's Sretenka street, the street of his youth. It was then that he was suffused with the voices of this lively Moscow corner. Those voices remained in his ears and through them he tuned himself, by the spirit and music of Russian street speech. It's all in the language, in a writer's feeling for it. If there's no such feeling, there's no writer, no artist. The right word vibrates throughout a story, keeps it together, makes it a whole.

Here lay another reason for not abandoning his country. The rupture with his language eventually does a writer in. He understood perfectly Pasternak's fear of being expelled from Russia. One thing they all forgot, those people who gave the ailing writer hasty advice: in the time of Dante, exile was the second harshest punishment; the first was the death penalty. They should never forget this, those so-called liberals, all those who think that a writer should preserve himself no matter what and fight the system. Fight! For a writer, exile is an execution.

He returned from his thoughts and noticed, to his relief, that the others had forgotten him. The young people were busy flirting, and the professor had begun to finger idly the books on the shelves. Everything was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

back to normal. Everything was as it should be. It was time to go. He was suddenly gripped by a sense of urgency. It seemed this was his last voyage, that he would die somewhere along the way, like Bunin's gentleman from San Francisco, a rich man in the hold of a liner with a still-undigested oyster in his stomach.

If he died suddenly, there would remain in him the disorder of a raw life, not yet filtered through his artistic brain. He knew that everything that came into his field of vision, finely tuned through many years of habit, would become a work of art.

I must get back to the hotel as soon as possible. I want to get back to Moscow. There my new novel is waiting. What if I die and the work gets lost? They won't print it as it is. Some loutish, pigeon-toed editor will crawl into the text, dig in his claws and tear out all that is best. He won't understand, the bastard, that this is more painful than to reach into my belly and rip out my insides. The way to do it, when the time comes, is to go to his office, and clutching frequently at my heart, wait until he signs it off to press, and then follow through to make sure that he, the monster, doesn't cross anything out, that he doesn't touch.

And Masha understood it again, as always. She gave a sign: It's time. Oh, Masha, Masha, what would I do without you? I would be helpless, completely helpless and lost.

Worn out by the long evening but still smiling with that indelible American smile, the professor took him on a little joyride deep down into the garage of the cavernous hotel; bathed in columns of light, the building resembled more a baroque cathedral than a human dwelling place. The writer again felt the impatient itch of the spindle twisting in his palms. He knew that he would work all night so as not to forget to bring to Moscow his last corrections.

The devil tempted me to leave, he burst out, repressing a feeling of nausea as the elevator sped toward the heavens. Anxious, he implored in the weak voice of a sick child:

What do you think, Masha? Has it gone to press? Will I have time to correct it? Masha knew very well this terror that often overcame him—the story would leave his hands and go to the printer's without his final approval.

You'll make it, you'll make it, invisible Masha patted him on the hand. Faithful Masha. Masha, who had left him long ago, more than two years now.

All she had said then was: I'm tired, Slava. I'm so tired.

Translated from the Russian by Sylvia Maizell

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

HORACE

i.11 / To Bullatius

So, Bullatius, what did you think of Chios?
What did you think of famous Lesbos? Or Smyrna?
Or Croesus's royal Sardis, or Colophon?
Or elegant Samos? Tell me, no matter whether
They're more or less than what you had expected,
Is any one of these places anything other
Than disappointing compared to the Campus Martius
Or to the Tiber? Or is it your heart's desire
To see at least one of the Atallids' cities, or, tired
Of seasides and highways, is Lebedus what you're after?
You know what it's really like there—not even Fidena,
Not even Gabii's, more desolate and deserted.

"Nevertheless I long to be there alone,
Forgetting the world, and glad to be forgotten,
Gazing from afar at Neptune's violence."

But a man who has traveled from Capua to Rome
And arrives at an inn all muddy and wet and chilled,
Wouldn't want to live on forever at the inn,
No matter how cozy he's made by its stove and hot baths.
If you arrived on the other side of the sea,
Safe and sound after a stormy crossing,
You wouldn't therefore decide to sell the ship
On which you were going to get back home again.
To a sensible free man, being away in Rhodes
Or beautiful Mitylene is like wearing
A heavy overcoat in the summertime,
Or wearing a loin cloth in the wintertime

Editor's Note: Excerpted from *The Epistles of Horace* by David Ferry. To be published in August 2001 by Farrar, Straus and Giroux, LLC. Copyright © 2001 by David Ferry. All rights reserved.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

To go in swimming in the freezing Tiber;
It's lighting up a stove in the middle of August.
While Fortune smiles on you and you're able to,
Stay home in Rome, while praising Samos and Chios
And Rhodes, and so on, as long as they're far away.

Whatever good things the god sees fit to give you,
Take them with thanks; don't think you can save them up
For a rainy day. You want to be able to say
You've lived a happy life. It's reason, good sense,
That takes away your cares; it isn't owning
A house at the shore that has a commanding view.
He only changes his scene, he doesn't change
His mind, who rushes to go abroad. How many
Are busy going elsewhere getting nowhere;
But if you have a healthy attitude,
Then what you're seeking to find can always be found
Right where you are, even in froggy Ulúbrae.

i.14 / To the Manager of His Farm

Manager of my woods and my little estate,
Which restores me to myself and which you scorn,
Although it supports five families and sends
Five worthy heads of household to Vicovaro,
Let's vie with one another to see who's better,
You at clearing brambles from the land,
Or me at clearing brambles from the mind.
Let's see which one of the two is in better shape,
Whether it's Horace himself or his Sabine farm.

Although I have to linger here in Rome
Because of my dear Lamia's care and sorrow,
Grieving as he is for his brother's death,
I long with all my heart and mind to break

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Through the constraints that hold me back from returning.
I call that man blessed who lives in the country;
And *you* call blessed the one who lives in town.
Naturally someone who envies the situation
Of someone else is going to hate his own.
Each of the two is foolish to blame the place.
It doesn't deserve it; the trouble is in the mind,
Which cannot ever get away from itself.

When you were slaving in Rome at dreary work,
You longed to be down in the country, and now you're there,
Steward of my estate, you long for the city,
The baths, the games, and all that; and as for me,
As you well know, I'm always the same about this:
I'm always sad when I have to set off to do
Some hateful business or other in the city.

We just don't like the same things. What you think of
As dreary inhospitable wilderness,
People like me call lovely, and we all hate
The things that you consider beautiful.
It's the brothels, I see, and the smoky little cafés
That arouse your desire to be in the city, not here
Where the earth yields nothing better than some meager
Pepper and spice, no wine, and where there's no tavern
For you to have a drink in, and no whore
Playing the flute for you to cavort to the tune of.
What's more, you have to sweat and strain to plow
The field no hoe has touched for years, and then
Unyoke the ox and fill him up with the fodder
You had to strip the leaves for, and after that,
When you're worn out, maybe it's rained, and so
You have to build up dams to keep the brook
From running over into the nearby meadow.

Here's what keeps us from singing the same tune:
He who once looked good, with his shining hair
And his spiffy city clothes, and who, although
He hadn't a sou, still somehow managed to please
His avaricious Cinara, and enjoyed
His cup of the best Falernum at lunch each day,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Is now content to have the simplest meal
And then a nap on the grass beside the brook.
It's not the folly of foolishness that's shameful;
The shame is not knowing when folly's time is over.

Down here in the country nobody's sidelong look
Takes away from my simple pleasures or poisons them
With the subtle indirections of city malice.
My country neighbors laugh out loud when they see me
Moving sods and stones this way and that.
You'd love to be eating in town with the city slaves;
You'd love to be in with them, part of the scene.
My city groom would love to be here in the country;
He covets your flock, your firewood, and your garden.
The ox wishes he wore the horse's saddle;
The horse, tired of riders, longs for the plough.
Let man and beast be content with what they're best at.

Translated from the Latin by David Ferry

TOM DISCH

Everyday Life in the Dutch Republic

Since he was in that part of the alphabet anyway
The crotchety philosopher decided he would play
A game of bowls with his old friend Hobbema

And started off along the avenue of poplars
In the direction of Infinity, an idea
They were both very fond of, though they defined

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It in different ways: for Meindert it was this
Rutted road to Middleharnis; Thomas would have it
We all live in a universe of tenpins

Where short, nasty brutes decapitate
The heads of kings as happily as they might blow the suds
Off a stein of ale in the tavern just up the road,

Where to this day a sepia reproduction of the painting
Hangs above the fire. It was painted in 1669;
Hobbes died a decade later. Ars longa, vita brevis.

DAN CHIASSON

Peach Tree

When did I plant this peach tree in my sleep and why
now does it seem to bloom
as though in answer to a prayer?

I did not ask to see the tree extend its bough so far
it almost disappeared
but finally unfolded this white flower.

I lived so long fearing the world's quaint
insufficiencies were mine—
as air would conjure earth, earth air

I stared at the little life made in my name, and thanked
the immediate and thanked the near.
I thanked my mother and my father and my other

mother and my other father, but when I
thanked them all I still
had fearfulness inside of me, mysterious.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

As water conjures fire and fire water, I discovered
that within I bore a boy who bore
my own name whom I had not thanked.

That night I dreamed of the field
of folk—the man with the fistful
of radishes, the passionate one, and the neighbor

whose granddaughter's eyes were closing for ever
and ever, and the hippie babysitter
with the white dog on the white leash, and

the CPA with the lemon Bonaventure. All seemed
to look on me with pity, as though
they knew my fate, knew its necessity.

I woke and there on the brilliant field outside
my window they were gathered,
a congregation circling the boy

I bore who bore my name, all staring
at the little flower on
the peach tree I had planted in my sleep.

MICHAL GOVRIN

Can't You See

Can't you see that I am carried to you on a sea of death
not on the Styx—that noble river in a marble Inferno
No Charon leads the raft
On my cheeks still lie the curls of the brother
in whose death I live
His breath is the wind in my hair

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Can't you hear, in our throats' echoes, the silence
the cry that does not relent, does not release—
of the heads
from whose number a hand was left
to knead our lives

Can't you see
lining up behind our faces
the trains that have carried us
on a journey ordained from then and there
Their whistle is our canopy
a pillar of smoke leading us
to the far ends of the wind

Translated from the Hebrew by the author, with Peter Cole

Partisan
Review

Visit us at
www.partisanreview.org

Current Issues
Contributors
PR Books
Archives
Conferences

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CUSHING STROUT

William James and the Tradition of American Public Philosophers

THE ROLE OF PUBLIC PHILOSOPHER in America is conspicuously absent today, but it has been recurringly present in our past. William James's colleague Josiah Royce pointed out that there have been three American philosophers who have been inventively original and also representative of "some stage in the spiritual life of our people": Jonathan Edwards, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and William James. Edwards was not only original in the formulation of his Puritan theology but he also "gave voice to some of the central motives and interests of our colonial religious life" and was the recognized intellectual leader of the revival movement known as the Great Awakening in the 1730s.

In the early nineteenth century Emerson, having given up his pastorship at a Unitarian church, was making a new career for himself on the lecture circuit, speaking eloquently on behalf of the new world of America and addressing some of its cultural, religious, and social issues. When Emerson spoke in New York in 1842, one member of the audience was Henry James, Sr. His son William had been born only two months earlier, and his father invited Emerson to his house where the lecturer was taken upstairs to admire the first-born son. It was appropriate that William James should have been asked in 1903 to speak at Concord about Emerson at a centenary ceremony where James saluted him as an artist of "spiritual seeing and reporting" who had sounded "a bugle blast" on behalf of "the sovereignty of the living individual."

Royce pointed out that James as a philosopher had a more extended range of influence in Europe than either Edwards or Emerson, who were both known and respected across the Atlantic. Royce noted that James belonged to the second stage of evolutionary thought, widening and deepening it, rather than polemicizing about it; and he played a "commanding part" in the "psychological movement" of the late nineteenth century, one that in its wider sense was connected with "all the modern forms of nationalism, of internationalism, of socialism, and of individualism." James sought to link up his philosophical role with the problems

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of the American people in the post-Civil War era in which amidst economic growth, territorial expansion, and massive immigration America was "attempting to find itself anew, to redefine its ideals, to retain its moral integrity, and yet to become a world power."

He and his brother Henry, unlike his other two younger brothers, had not served in the Civil War. Their father had restrained them from enlisting, but in any case the older boys had been much more familiar with tourism in Europe, where their father had sought an informal education for them, than with the escalating political strife of America with which the younger sons were much more involved. One of the younger sons, Wilkinson, had been almost fatally wounded at the battle of Fort Wagner in South Carolina, where he had served with Colonel Robert Gould Shaw, head of a regiment of free black men, many of whom had died with their young leader. In 1897 William James, already much better known than his younger brothers, had been asked to speak to several thousand people in Boston's Music Hall to celebrate the unveiling of the famous monument by St. Gaudens to honor the white officer who had led the doomed assault on Fort Wagner. Shaw's regiment had done more than anyone else, nevertheless, to convince the public that Negro troops could fight bravely and well, thus paving the way for their broader participation in the war after Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. Rather than giving the usual praise of military heroes for their military actions, however, James instead saluted Shaw for his "civic courage" in taking the command, because in this new venture "loneliness was certain, ridicule inevitable, failure possible, and Shaw was only twenty-five. . . ."

In his lectures at Edinburgh in 1901–2 on "The Varieties of Religious Experience" James had about four hundred enthusiastic auditors, who were drawn by his extraordinary fusion of psychological and religious concerns, both of which were animated by his own personal experience as a young man of radical doubt, depression, and conflicting ambitions. James's father had blended a tough-minded Calvinism with a mystically enthusiastic Swedenborgianism. His son was too much educated in medicine, natural history, and evolutionary biology to follow his father's eccentric footsteps in this way, even though both had experienced severe crises about vocational choice. But he did follow his father's advice to earn respect by having a scientific career, though his nervous troubles became evident as soon as he set out on it. While hospitalized with varioloid, a mild form of smallpox, when he was in Brazil as part of an exploring and collecting expedition led by Louis Agassiz in 1864, James had decided that he was "cut out for a speculative rather than an active life" and having recovered the use of his eyes, made a new resolution:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"When I get home I'm going to study philosophy all my days." Instead he continued his medical studies, and became increasingly depressed and even suicidal. Once he was overwhelmed by a panic fear that but for the grace of God he might become like a passively withdrawn, idiotic, and epileptic patient whom he had seen in an asylum. The son needed to find some essential room for the idea and exercise of his freedom of the will. He had found help not only in the French philosopher Renouvier but also in Wordsworth's poetry. It is not hard to see why the poet was pertinent to him. As Meyer Abrams has pointed out in *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (1971), Wordsworth's most important poetry was a form of "creative autobiography" that "turns on a crisis which involves the question of the meaning of the author's life and the purpose of his suffering" and "is resolved by the author's discovery of his literary identity and vocation and the attendant need to give up worldly involvement for artistic detachment. . . ." (John Stuart Mill, to whom James would dedicate *Pragmatism*, also found help in recovering from his own depression by reading Wordsworth's poetry.)

In his Edinburgh lectures the son wanted to pay tribute to his father's blazing conviction that religion was real, while maintaining at the same time his own modern psychological and philosophical thinking. There was a Jamesian moment, as it were, because he was undogmatic, not a church member, not a promoter of any sect. He had impressive scientific credentials as the author of *The Principles of Psychology*, the first important American work in that field; and yet he was extraordinarily willing to pay close and respectful attention to those who had had religious experiences, however bizarre they might seem to nonbelievers. Audiences were charmed that he spoke and wrote with an artist's feeling for concrete and vivid imagery and with an Irish wit. One of his colleagues at Harvard spoke vividly of James's style as "wallowing," that is, moving through his material "as the whale does through the sea, twisting and turning at his pleasure, tossing up foam for mere sport, and plunging or rising as the fancy strikes. James always wallowed." He was well versed in addressing large audiences, having spent a week at Chautauqua with its thousands of good people, comprising, he said, a sort of "middle-class paradise, without a sin, without a victim, without a blot, without a tear." It made him long for the "big outside worldly wilderness with all its sins and sufferings."

In his lectures on religious experience, James drew on a democratically wide spectrum of material from saints, philosophers, artists, and ordinary people. The scope of his believers included Protestants,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Catholics, Jews, Buddhists, Christian Scientists, Transcendentalists, Quakers, Mormons, Mohammedans, Melanesian cannibals, drug-takers, atheists, and neurotics, including himself concealed in the guise of an anonymous Frenchman to whom (James later confessed) he had attributed his own experience of panic fear in the asylum.

Nothing could have been further from the inventory in his lectures of disturbing religious experiences than the Anglican religion, which he characterized in a letter to his friend Pauline Goldmark as "obese and round and comfortable and decent with this world's decencies, without an *acute* note in its whole life or history, in spite of the shrill Jewish words on which its ears are fed, and the nitro-glycerine of the Gospels and Epistles which has been injected into its veins." In the end his conceptualizing of religion came down to the centrality of one type of experience very familiar to Americans, the conversion of the "twice-born sick soul" through a crisis into a new consciousness in which "surrender and sacrifice are positively espoused."

He also outlined by contrast another familiar form of American religion, "the religion of healthy mindedness," which cultivates the "sky-blue" optimistic gospel of the "once-born," whose development is "straight and natural, with no element of morbid compunction or crisis." Yet on his own evidence the religion of healthy mindedness, preached in his day by Christian Scientists and other "mind-curers," attracted the nervous and the sick, not the robust and the healthy; and in a footnote James acknowledged that in his case histories of the mind-cure form of healthy mindedness, there were "abundant examples of regenerative process." His concepts tended to conflate psychological genesis with doctrinal perspective.

What stands out in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, nevertheless, is his sympathy for the point of view held by the classic examples of "twice-born" sick souls, those for whom the "evil facts" which the "healthy-minded" refuse to recognize are actually "a genuine portion of reality," James insists; "and they may after all be the best key to life's significance, and possibly the only openers of our eyes to the deepest levels of truth." In a remarkable passage James observes that

> the normal process of life contains moments as bad as any of those which insane melancholy is filled with, moments in which radical evil gets its innings and takes its solid turn. . . .Here on our very hearths and in our gardens the infernal cat plays with the panting mouse, or holds the hot bird fluttering in her jaws.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

So the completest religions, he concludes, "are those in which the pessimistic elements are best developed."

It was here that he most parted company with Emerson, who had said we should admire a soul "whose acts are regal, graceful, and pleasant as roses" and not turn against such an angel and say "Crump is a better man, with his grunting resistance to all his native devils." James replied in a wonderful footnote: "True enough. Yet Crump may be the better Crump for his inner discords and second birth," while the regal character may "fall far short of what he individually might be had he only some Crump-like capacity for compunction over his own peculiar diabolisms, graceful and pleasant and invariably gentlemanly as these may be." Sorrow and suffering are for James the soul's "heroic resources," and he appealed to "the common instinct for reality" that holds the world "to be essentially a theater for heroism."

James's father complained that Emerson lacked "a conviction of sin," as Calvinists called it, and William shared with his father a Puritan strain that connected them to Jonathan Edwards. William specifically cited Edwards's *Treatise on Religious Affections* for its argument that "no appearances whatever are infallible proofs of grace. Our practice is the only sure evidence, even to ourselves, that we are genuinely Christians." As a philosopher of pragmatism James was thoroughly at home with this emphasis on practice because for him beliefs are rules for action, so that "to develop a thought's meaning we need therefore only determine what conduct it is fitted to produce." James was resolutely humanistic, however, as Edwards was not, and evaluated theologies by "the voice of human experience within us, judging and condemning all gods that stand athwart the pathway along which it feels itself to be advancing." From this point of view "the gods we stand by are the gods we need and can use, the gods whose demands on us are reinforcements of our demands on ourselves and on one another."

He himself had no sense of living commerce with God, and his ultimate belief in the supernatural came down to his psychologist's confidence that in faith and in prayer there is some "actual inflow of energy." Having spent so much time in his Edinburgh lectures on making this point credible, he found that he had too little time left to develop his philosophical views about it. All that he could suggest was that he had an "over-belief" that such states are connected to a larger realm of personality, a universe not defined by "the sectarian scientist's attitude" in which "the world of sensations and scientific laws and objects may be all." But he was typically heretical in thinking that God need not be single or infinite, and as a pluralist he rejected the tendency to "consider

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the world as one unit of absolute fact." It was this monistic tendency that he found to be a major fault in his father's theology, in Emerson's transcendentalism, and in Josiah Royce's version of Absolute Idealism in which the totality of everything is "present at once to the eternal divine consciousness as a single whole." There's an amusing photograph of Royce and James in 1903 sitting on a New Hampshire wall. When James heard his daughter's camera click, he cried, "Royce, you're being photographed! Look out! I say Damn the Absolute!" For James a finite God had the advantage of fitting "the ordinary moralistic state of mind" that makes "the salvation of the world conditional upon the success with which each unit does its part."

James late in life wrote "A Suggestion about Mysticism," but what is remarkable about it is not its religious but its psychological content. It is a report on a disturbing dream that he had in which he seemed to belong to "three different dream systems at once," none of them connected to the other, or to his waking life. He felt desperately lost, and the dream gave him "a new pity towards persons passing into dementia." As the psychoanalyst Erik H. Erikson has suggested, the dream would seem to have uncovered not a supernatural realm but a reliving in fantasy of James's youthful acute identity confusion, reappearing as he struggled with the conflict in old age (in Erikson's terms) between "hopes for a higher integrity" and "terminal despair."

Actually, James's most mystical experience had to do with his response to nature, which was always an important part of his life, especially camping, hiking, and climbing in the Adirondacks. In Keene Valley he was part owner of Putnam's Camp, named for his friend James Jackson Putnam, a pioneer in American psychotherapy, who became a convert to Freudian psychoanalysis after he met Freud in 1909 at Clark University. James was in Panther Gorge when he was working on the Edinburgh lectures, and in the moonlight before a fire his experience became "a regular *Walpurgis Nacht* with the Gods of all the nature-mythologies" meeting in his breast with "the moral Gods of the inner life. . . ." These two kinds of Gods had nothing in common, he felt, and this idea made him feel that "the Edinburgh lectures made quite a hitch ahead."

For him this state of special alertness was full of "every sort of patriotic suggestiveness" and was connected to his wife, his friend the youthful Pauline Goldmark, his children, and his brother Henry—all fermenting within him, along with "the problem of the Edinburgh lectures." The experience seems to have been more aesthetic than religious, for he said it made him understand "what a poet is." As his friend John

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Jay Chapman remarked, in his speaking and writing James created a public "which came to see in him only the saint and the sage, which felt only the religious truth which James was in search of, yet could never quite grasp in his hand." Instead it "shone, as it were, straight through his waistcoat, and distributed itself to everyone in the drawing room or in the lecture hall where he sat."

James's position on the religious scene in America was complex. He was sympathetic to the "utopian dreams of social justice" of his day insofar as they represented secular forms of saintly charity. But the social-gospel churches were more likely to be Episcopal than to be revivalist, and the liberal theologians did not have his Methodist-like feeling for twice-bornness. James saluted saintly forms of "non-resistance" as prophets of a better future, but he was also hard-headedly aware that "the whole history of constitutional government is a commentary on the excellence of resisting evil, and when one cheek is smitten, of smiting back and not turning the other cheek also." His balance has the risky charm of a circus performer holding a pole as he crosses a wire high up in the tent.

He was faced with the challenge of performing another balancing act (or what he called "beating and tacking") in his response to the ideal of "the strenuous life," preached by Theodore Roosevelt and Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, who often used it to justify war and imperialism. In one sense James was himself an advocate of the strenuous ideal because he was a believer in heroism as the moral significance of life. His famous essay on "The Moral Equivalent of War" was a warning to his fellow reformers that the martial virtues gave war a persistent and compelling place in the human imagination, and some surrogate for them would have to be found so as to "inflame the civic temper" as "past history has inflamed the military temper."

James was outraged by the imperialism of the Republicans in the Philippines and took to the newspapers to combat them, Governor Theodore Roosevelt in particular. The Governor, he wrote, was "in the *Sturm und Drang* period of early adolescence, treats human affairs when he makes speeches about them from the sole point of view of the organic excitement and difficulty they may bring, gushes over war. . .for the manly strenuousness it involves, and treats peace as a condition of blubberlike and swollen ignobility fit only for huckstering weaklings, dwelling in gray twilight and heedless of the higher life." You might think that James sounded that way himself in his essay on "The Moral Equivalent of War," but James pointed out the crucial difference. With Roosevelt there was "not a word of the cause, one foe is as good as

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

another, for aught he tells us; not a word of the conditions of success." After all, James reminded him, the Southern secessionists when they chose battle rather than having Lincoln as President were leading the strenuous life just as much as the Union forces whom Roosevelt idealized and for whom Justice Holmes as a young man had fought and been wounded three times. Now the McKinley Administration, James charged, "was openly engaged in crushing out the sacredest thing in this great human world—the attempt of a people long enslaved to attain to the possession of itself, to organize its laws and government, to be free to follow its internal destinies according to its own ideals."

In attacking Herbert Spencer's sociological determinism, in which individuals never counted for anything important, James emphasized the role of great men in history as a kind of Darwinian spontaneous variation, which the social environment "adopts or rejects, preserves or destroys, in short *selects*," and by doing so is modified by the great man's influence in "an entirely original and peculiar way." The causes that changed communities from generation to generation, he argued, have been due to "the accumulated influences of individuals, of their examples, their initiatives, and their decisions." Yet James's temper was thoroughly democratic, and it led him to find the exemplary virtues of courage, endurance, and fidelity in "the daily lives of the laboring classes," as lived on "freight-trains, the decks of vessels, in cattle-yards and mines, on lumber-rafts, among the firemen and the policemen." Even so, he understood the value of a leader with liberal ambitions who, when things get dammed up, could make a hole in the dam for "flowing water" to enlarge it, and an educated country would be able "to use such men for what they are worth, and to cast them off before they victimize it." Robert Penn Warren has said that in the shadow of *All the King's Men* was the "benign figure of William James" as well as Huey Long and Mussolini. James would have been quick to see how Long's populism, for all its genuine reforms, had become warped into a victimizing dictatorship, just as he would have been proud that many Italian philosophers of Pragmatism lost their lives opposing fascism.

Characteristically, James first formulated Pragmatism in popular lectures before they were published in 1907, when he resigned from Harvard with great relief, feeling free "after thirty-five years of being owned by others." Rereading Emerson's works in preparation for celebrating Emerson at Concord in 1903, James had responded most to Emerson's tonic example of a man who had kept on his own nonconforming path with faith in his individual mission. This precedent had encouraged James to have the confidence to present Pragmatism as his contribution

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to philosophy. His recognized identity as a public philosopher was made evident by the size of his university audience—more than a thousand people. It was, he acknowledged, "certainly the high tide" of his existence so far as "*energizing*, and being 'recognized' were concerned."

He hoped to impart to his audience some news of a "new dawn" in philosophy. There was a conflict between rationalists and empiricists in philosophy, which he symbolized by the difference between "tender-foot Bostonians" and "Rocky Mountain toughs." James located Pragmatism in the empiricist philosophical tradition (hence his dedication of the book to John Stuart Mill), but he presented it at first not as a metaphysics but as a method for turning theories into instruments for moving our inquiries forward. It had no dogmas or doctrines of its own. In this respect it was the method of modern experimental science, and the idea of truth that follows from it is functional: new truth "marries old opinion to new fact so as ever to show a minimum of jolt, a maximum of continuity."

He knew that rationalists of all kinds, seeking absolute principles and eternal truths, would find this sort of empiricism ignoble and coarse. To them he made a characteristically Jamesian response: "The prince of darkness may be a gentleman, as we are told he is, but whatever the God of earth and heaven is, he can surely be no gentleman. His menial services are needed in the dust of our human trials, even more than his dignity is needed in the empyrean." James's claim that Pragmatism was only a method for clarifying the meaning of ideas turned out to be somewhat disingenuous for it is clear that he thought it should "turn its back on absolute monism, and follow pluralism's more empirical path" in which things are partly joined and partly disjoined. Moreover, for "pluralistic pragmatism" truth is profoundly humanistic: "all 'homes' are in finite experience; finite experience as such is homeless. Nothing outside of the flux secures the issue of it. It can hope salvation only from its own intrinsic promises and potencies." This eloquent Jamesian respect for finitude is, I think, the most modern and radical aspect of his philosophizing, but he drew back, nevertheless, from the tough-minded in their "rejection of the whole notion of a world beyond our finite experience."

The lectures were only in part technically philosophical; they also returned to James's own religious questionings and to the argument he had long ago had with his father's monism in contrast to a more pluralistic moralism, a point of view that James had turned to when he was struggling as a young man to overcome his tendency to depression and despair. James recognized a conflict between religion as "self-surrender" and moralism as "self-sufficingness" (what Emerson would have called

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

self-reliance); and he tended to identify religion with the "sick-minded" and moralism with the "healthy-minded." Of course, he conceded, as individuals we could sometimes be "healthy minds on one day and sick souls on the next"; but philosophers needed to be more consistent. James's feeling for the central role of heroism made him confess that his own pragmatism recoiled from religious optimism about a world already saved in favor instead of a more chancy, dangerous, and unfinished world: "Doesn't the very 'seriousness' that we attribute to life mean that ineluctable noes and losses form a part of it, that there are genuine sacrifices somewhere, and that something permanently drastic and bitter always remains at the bottom of its cup?"

This eloquent tough-mindedness in *Pragmatism* is often overlooked in James because at other moments he can express some limited sympathy in some contexts for utopian reformers and even for "the healthy minded once-born," sentiments which may seem more American to many of his commentators. Yet he had advertised Pragmatism in the beginning of his lectures as a mediator between "the tender-minded" and "the tough-minded," and so in the end he returned to the idea that "higher powers exist and are at work to save the world on ideal lines similar to our own." We might be in the universe as dogs and cats are in our libraries, being "merely tangent to curves of history the beginnings and ends and forms of which pass wholly beyond their ken." It was a characteristically Jamesian compromise expressed with his characteristic flair for the homely metaphor.

James's writing is so expressive of the man that it might seem as if it would be too idiosyncratic to have an influence, but in fact Pragmatism was a movement in philosophy that had its passionate proponents in England and Europe, so that James, as Ralph Barton Perry put it, was "the Ambassador of American Thought to Western Europe." He was, like Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson, a cosmopolitan American patriot who could speak to the world, and he has been credited by the historian H. Stuart Hughes with being "the revivifying force in European thought in the decade and a half preceding the outbreak of the First World War."

But the recent revival of Pragmatism, chiefly led by the philosopher Richard Rorty, has invoked John Dewey rather than James. Dewey linked himself to James in their common belief that the "chief business of philosophy" is to show how "desire and ideas, purpose and knowledge, emotion and science, can cooperate fruitfully in behalf of human good." Both men were Darwinian, but Dewey always set out from the context of the organism and its environment, truth and value being

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

functions of a growing organism's accommodating, adapting, or reconstructing its relationship to its environment through the exercise of what he called "the method of intelligence." His focus was on problem-solving truths in contrast to James's profound interest in truths of orientation and in the confronting of issues that are posed for the will, rather than for technological control or scientific understanding.

Dewey was like James in having an admirable sense of public responsibility as a philosopher-citizen. As a trustee of Hull House in Chicago, he marched in a suffragettes' parade in New York, shared platforms with labor leaders, and in 1937 courageously went to Mexico to investigate and expose the Soviet trumped-up charges against Leon Trotsky. Dewey's most recent admirer, Alan Ryan, has rightly called him a "secular preacher and lay saint to the Republic" in his role as philosopher of a religion of democracy.

Dewey's temper was markedly different from James. Seeking to harmonize every dualism into a unity, his positive thinking entirely lacked James's sense of radical evil. "Before choice no evil presents itself as evil," Dewey wrote, as if it were only a competing good before it was rejected. "Only when the past ceases to trouble and anticipations of the future are not perturbing," Dewey asserted, "is a being wholly united with his environment and therefore fully alive." James might rightly have considered such a bland harmony as being true only of the corpse in the grave. Ryan, for all his admiration, concedes that Dewey "took for granted a malleability and predictability in institutional arrangements that all experience refutes." If in 1920 Dewey wanted the Baconian theme of knowledge as power to come to "a free and unhindered expression," by 1939 he was well aware that a science of human nature might only "multiply the agencies by which some human beings manipulate other human beings for their own advantage" and thus obscure the "fundamentally moral nature of the social problem."

Dewey had defended President Wilson's intervention in the First World War and had been dismayed by its results. A burnt child who shunned the fire, he clung thereafter to an old-fashioned sense that an American "resort to military force is a first sure sign that we are giving up the struggle for the democratic way of life, and that the Old World has conquered morally as well as geographically—succeeding in imposing upon us its ideals and methods." Giving a speech when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, Dewey remarkably proclaimed: "I have nothing, had nothing, and have nothing now to say directly about the war." It was a sign of the end of his role as an American public philosopher.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

His utopian strain meant that, though he was not a member of the Socialist party, he always voted for Norman Thomas until Harry Truman's victory in 1948. Dewey's orientation was primarily towards the future rather than the past, but if he had had more of a historical sense, he might also have been more aware of the intractable, of unavoidably conflicting loyalties, and of the unintended, unforeseeable consequences of action. Ryan always reads Dewey as sympathetically as he possibly can, but he acknowledges that Dewey was vulnerable in a way that James was not to the charge that pragmatism had little to say about events like war that are "not easily explained as intelligent problem solving."

James had concluded from a tour of Italy's ruins that they showed powerfully "how man's life is based historically on sheer force and will and fight, and how the inner world only grows up inside and under the shelter of these brute tendencies." He always lamented that his philosophy was incomplete, like an "unfinished arch, built only on one side"; and a philosophy of history, which he never had, might have helped complete it. "I am finite once and for all," James wrote, "and all the categories of my sympathy are knit up with the finite world *as such* and with things that have a history." As Arthur O. Lovejoy pointed out, James was unusual among philosophers for having "a keen sense of the validity and the distinctiveness of the temporal point of view."

James died in 1910, and the next generation of philosophers was the first to be purely professional in the modern academic sense, as the historian Bruce Kuklick has noted; and with its specialization, philosophy lost its public. It is revealing that the man who reclaimed that public was not a philosopher but a theologian and preacher, Reinhold Niebuhr. "I stand in the William James tradition," Niebuhr wrote. "He was both an empiricist and a religious man." But Niebuhr recognized that he was different from James in emphasizing "collective destiny," rather than individualism, in social life and "the meaning of history," rather than mysticism, in the religious life. A circuit rider to colleges and liberal organizations in the 1940s and 1950s, Niebuhr yoked together the political ideals of modern liberalism with a conservative theological respect for the symbols and myths of Biblical Christianity, which he found expounded with intellectual power in the European existentialist-Christian theologies of Soren Kierkegaard, Paul Tillich, and Emil Brunner.

Niebuhr and Dewey were at contrary philosophical poles about religion and psychology, but they were often in the same political camp with a common reluctance to endorse the New Deal until it was virtually over and with a shared vigorous opposition to Stalinist communism

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

as well as to reactionary and fanatical anti-communism. Niebuhr had been a radical pacifist, but he developed a realistic sense of history, and it induced him to become a leading critic of pacifism in order that free peoples could resist with force the imperialism of Hitler. As early as 1932 he had prophetically suggested, however, that nonviolent resistance would be the most effective method for the liberation of the Negro in America, as Martin Luther King, Jr. proved in practice twenty-five years later. Niebuhr's favorite American example of a political hero was Abraham Lincoln for his political realism about slavery and his religious sense of America being under judgment for its crimes. "I might have been an historian," he once told an interviewer, but his daughter had reminded him that he was "not enough of an empiricist to be a good historian." In Niebuhr's book *The Irony of American History* (1952) there is much dialectical theologizing of irony as his mode of cultural criticism, but his demythologizing of American exceptionalism and laissez-faire optimism in economic matters is tempered by his recognition of the political realism embedded in the theory of checks and balances, which the framers of the American Constitution had outlined in *The Federalist Papers*.

There is a current revival of pragmatism, which has already had academic conferences to celebrate it; but it is filtered through Richard Rorty's strange blend of Dewey's progressivism with the skepticism of Nietzsche and French deconstructionists. Rorty has the ambition to be a public philosopher as well as a specialized professional, but in either role he has not yet made the kind of difference that either James or Dewey made. Radically skeptical of all metaphysics and aggressively atheistic, Rorty has no room for Niebuhr and relegates James to the role of precursor to Dewey. Rorty is in sympathy with the literary postmodernists, but the great public literary critics in the past, like George Orwell, Edmund Wilson, and Lionel Trilling, have no counterparts on the contemporary scene. One of Rorty's allies, Cornel West, writing in an anthology, *Pragmatism: From Progressivism to Postmodernism*, declares that "the loss of Paul de Man, his authorizing and legitimizing intellectual presence, intensified the crisis of vocation among humanistic intellectuals." The discovery of de Man's youthful role as a propagandist for the fascist occupiers of his country was a literary scandal that attracted much publicity; but the notion that this arcane, obscure, and detached ironist, for whom all attempts to control meaning are self-undermining, was an icon for humanist intellectuals in general suggests that literary theorists in recent years have indulged themselves in delusions of grandeur. They have also contributed to the fragmented

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

contemporary campus in which any ethnic group is assumed to be entitled to cultural nationalism and to be beyond criticism except by its own representatives.

James's radical individualism, which went along with his strong sense of having an American identity, makes him seem entirely out of step with this climate of opinion. The anthropologist Clifford Geertz has pointed out that our sense of religion today connects it to the "communal sensibility of a religiously assertive social actor," rather than to private struggles with inner demons, as James did. Dewey left out the demons entirely, and both men also isolated religious experience not only from its institutional life in churches and sects, but also from its particular theological traditions. As Geertz argues, however, the movement of religion towards the center of social life, nevertheless, is "not a unitary phenomenon to be uniformly described." We must deal with "the personal inflections of religious engagement that reach far beyond the personal into the conflicts and dilemmas of our age." In that sense social religion is also a diverse individual matter; and for those stories, he concludes, we shall need analysts with Jamesian sympathies, analytic insight, and literary skill. They will need a measure of his genius to be able to speak to general audiences and to respond as incisively and eloquently as he did to public issues and to a wide range of individual experience.

Recent fiction by J. Inchardi

I REACH OVER NOW
MORNING IN SNUG HARBOR
A ROSE COLORED BOAT
US
ATLANTIS
QUEEN B
URIAH

Order from Sirius Books, P.O. Box, 177
Freeport Maine, 04032. ($20.00 each)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CLIFFORD J. MARKS

Daniel Deronda: Community, Spirituality, and Minor Literature

> "No," said Mordecai, "no, Pash, because you have lost the heart of the Jew. Community was felt before it was called good. I praise no superstition, I praise the living fountains of enlarging belief. What is growth, completion, development? You began with that question, I apply it to the history of our people. I say that the effect of our separateness will not be completed and have its highest transformation unless our race takes on again the character of a nationality."
>
> George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*

The crisis of faith challenged late Victorians to reconsider their intellectual models that defended and rejected traditional religious practice. Typical of the time, an unattributable article in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, "Modern Scepticism and its Fruit" (1875), frames the knotty issues surrounding scientific discovery and religious devotion:

> I remember reading an exhortation to mankind not to conclude that effort is useless because modern research has sapped the foundations of all belief, but to put their talents, fortunes, authority—nay, their thews and sinews—to what were in darker times accounted good uses, in the hope that science, as it grows brighter and brighter, may yet show that old-fashioned goodness and usefulness are not irreconcilable with enlightenment.

The reviewer argues that the rush to embrace science as providing all of society's answers does not only damage the religious enterprise, but, in many quarters, subjugates religion to the whims of scientific experiment and proof. Pitying those who barter "their faith, their hope, their light, their consolation" for reason and fashion, the author contends that science offers little in the way of verifiable enlightenment. Instead, sounding "modern," science leads its adherents down a primrose path that distances mankind from true spiritual sources. To conclude, the author argues that the defenders of religion should not confine "their

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

arguments to sermons." The writer asserts that weaknesses abound in the contemporary elevation of scientific thought; religious thinkers should articulate their faith while concurrently exposing the inconsistencies in their opponents' arguments.

George Eliot's agnosticism designates her as a religious skeptic, to say the least. One would expect her to be at the forefront of the battle proclaiming science's rationalist victory over religion. But her complicated personal relationship with belief culminates in the production of her final novel *Daniel Deronda* (1876). As Frederick Karl notes in his biography, Mary Anne Evans grew up educated in the Anglican tradition, but at the age of fourteen became "caught up by the religious swirl" of the Oxford Movement and evangelicalism. She was an avid, if not stern, believer in Calvinistic Christian doctrine and often energetically led prayer meetings at the Franklin's School. But from 1834 until 1842, her faith gradually shifted from enthusiastic belief to significant doubt about the morality of organized religion. Through readings of secular literature, religious documents, and the Old and New Testaments, among other books, she began to adopt a more philosophical view about questions of faith, resulting in an attraction to various explanations of spiritual practice outside of the guidance of a church.

Eliot never stopped exploring issues of faith and religion. Karl summarizes her later conflicted spiritual beliefs as they appeared in 1873, shortly before she published *Daniel Deronda*:

> But as she approached her final long fiction, she was still attempting to find some middle path through all the minefields of nineteenth-century beliefs: Comtean and Harisonian positivism, religious orthodoxy of one kind or another, utilitarianism (Bentham's or John Stuart Mill's), Huxley's agnosticism, Darwin's evolutionism and determinism, Spencer's social Darwinism, and Marxism and its various offshoots.

For one reason or another, she found each "system" lacking. She wanted to embrace a philosophy that substantiated her ethics of giving without absolutely compromising the possibility of divinity. In a late 1877 letter to Frederic Myers, Eliot responded to Myers's sense that he had a universal experience of "love and woe" through mourning. She says, "you express that spiritual result which seems to me the fount of real betterment for poor mankind." Further down, she adds "the most melancholy thought surely would be that we in our own persons had

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

measured and exhausted the sources of spiritual good. But we know how the poor help the poor."

Her novels depict this constantly concerned and evolving attitude. Beginning with *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1857) and culminating in *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot's representation of religion complexly reflects the numerous debates of the day. These novels neither reject nor denounce religion. *Daniel Deronda* creates a space where the atheist, materialist, and cleric can meet. Paradoxically, the space for a spiritual renewal in Christian culture is Jewish. While many of her novels depict a mercurial, shifting Christianity—*Adam Bede* and *Middlemarch*, for example—these works do not adequately resolve their contentious spiritual issues. *Daniel Deronda*, of all her novels, focuses intently on the question of spiritual practice and how that practice has universal significance. Judaism becomes a testing ground for questions of spirituality, philosophy, ethics, and politics. For Eliot, pure religious spirituality is not the novel's main concern. She does not anticipate the Jewish religion entering into the mainstream. Rather, Eliot understands the need for a multiplicity of faiths, while using a specifically defined Judaism as a synecdoche for a spirituality that would accept the significance of the material world while embracing the notion of a viable political community. For this essay, I define spirituality as that state which would have the individual reach beyond himself for answers and guidance to life's moral and ethical dilemmas. But, and this is crucial for Eliot, the "beyond" does not exist solely in the supernatural. The "beyond" can be recognized, utilized, and celebrated in this world. Some have argued that Eliot looks to revitalize her nation's lagging spirituality. In part the novel does this, but its depiction of Daniel Deronda suggests that, as opposed to a nationalist agenda, Eliot advocates a universalist spirituality. Ultimately, this spirituality can be applied to the English national scene because it has ubiquitous, humanist dimensions.

To succeed, though, Eliot must balance Jewish self-representation with her own place in a dominant culture hostile to Judaism. How can a minor culture's basic rituals, beliefs, and social standing, which are belittled or denied by the majority culture, be embraced by that same majority culture? While the novel mostly champions Jewish culture, it questions Judaism's potential redemptive value in British society because it focuses so much on the resolution of the Jewish Question of nationhood. That Daniel travels extensively throughout Europe, and leaves for Palestine at the novel's end, reflects the narrative's tentative avowal of Jewish perspectives. Eliot seems to fear the consequences if Daniel completely renews his Jewish spirituality in England.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But of all the minority populations she could have chosen, why did Eliot select Jews? For Eliot, Judaism strongly embraced the notion of community and how that community strengthened itself through vigorous human relationships. Judaism represented part of British life that was simultaneously both outside and inside, operating at a certain level oblivious to the general population, but significantly present to informed individuals. Eliot represented a limited Anglican Christianity as the dominant culture with hegemonic rights and power. While the novel does not promote an antagonistic relationship between Jews and Christians, it does unfold many characteristics of each religious culture that allow for compelling contrasts. Eliot masterfully sets up the prejudices that Jews face, as well as their individual strengths and weaknesses, and places Daniel Deronda at the center of an ethical dilemma.

Eliot depicts a complicated Judaism throughout the novel. Her intimacy with Jewish knowledge and history, her desire to include varying degrees of Jewish thought and internal dispute, and her analysis of the complexity of Jewish spirituality, speak to this complexity. Jewish discussion offers competing and often confusing ideas. At times contentious, political, spiritual, philosophical, or mystical, Eliot offers a mosaic of Judaism that challenges a reader's preconceived or prejudiced notion. In addition to speaking with Jewish friends like Emanuel Deutsch and visiting Jewish synagogues, Eliot consulted many Jewish sources to write *Daniel Deronda*, as demonstrated in Jane Irwin's *George Eliot's Daniel Deronda Notebooks*. These included, among others, Mishnah, Talmud, Midrash, Maimonides, and the Kabbalah. Not all of these sources made it into the novel, but Eliot's knowledge of them informs the Jewish themes, particularly in the "Hand and Banner" chapters. Here, Eliot describes how political, religious, and philosophical questions can be debated without the kind of rancor usually associated with disagreement. These debates inform a language that allows individuals to assert their beliefs without their cores being threatened.

Toward the end of the novel, sitting among men of various intellectual, spiritual, and political convictions, Daniel engages in these debates with the help of Mordecai. The Philosopher's Club, as Eliot notes, gives this group a safe place to discuss wide-ranging ideas about progress, religion, science, etc. When Mordecai enters with Daniel, the discussion, focusing on progress, soon turns to Judaism. Shifting the conversation from progress to Judaism implies a relationship between the two subjects, as Mordecai will later detail. Pash and Lilly reject Mordecai's notion that "Israel is the heart of mankind," with Lilly replying, "as a race they have no development in them." Mordecai responds:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> Let their history be known and examined; let the seed be sifted, let its beginnings be traced to the weed of the wilderness—the more glorious will be the energy that transformed it. Where else is there a nation of whom it may be as truly said that their religion and law and moral life mingled as the stream of blood in the heart and made one growth—where else a people who kept and enlarged their spiritual store at the very time when they were hunted with a hatred as fierce as the forest-fires that chase the wild beast from its covert?

Mordecai, whose knowledge of Jewish law, history, and philosophy is unparalleled in Victorian fiction, emphasizes the tenacity of Judaism. Despite the obliteration of its physical nation centuries before, Jews continued to evolve through their study of the book. In part, the mingling of "religion, laws, and morals" made this possible. Additionally, the intensity of their foes, at first Roman and later Christian, could have easily forced them to abandon their religion in the face of the majority power. But they did not. Instead, Jews embraced the struggle to keep alive the spirit of their faith.

Various discourses are deployed in this discussion. Mordecai combines biblical, midrashic, and cabalistic ideas; Gideon is a rational Jew who does not want to abandon the religion, but wants the Jews, having gained "political equality," to blend in with the majority population. Gideon and Pash, quite rationally, see the idea of Jewish Nationhood as nonsense, but Mordecai sternly rejects this position. If they truly want humanity to evolve, then they would see how Israel could be at the forefront.

Mordecai insists that his hope for Israel is not in any way magical or antirationalist. Although he embraces a religion that he claims needs its own nation, he still sees his ideas as a logical progression in humanity's development. In fact, he says, "I cherish nothing for the Jewish nation, I seek nothing for them, but the good which promises good to all nations. The spirit of our religious life, which is one with our national life, is not hatred of aught but wrong." That Mordecai can seamlessly weave together political, religious, and philosophical discourse reflects Eliot's ability to do the same. But his inability to translate his "writings" for others speaks to his need for a spokesperson from the majority culture, a deliverer, so to speak, to bridge the gap between the minor and major cultures. Eliot, a ventriloquist for Jewish ideas throughout, cannot be that person. Daniel, however, can. He can use his majority status to inscribe the minority idea, an idea that can infuse all nations, as Mordecai suggests, in the construction of spiritual community.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

If Jews occupy the margin and Christians the mainstream, in Daniel we observe a seeming Christian with initial questions and concerns regarding Judaism. But Daniel, whether his origins are Jewish or Christian, remains concerned primarily with transforming *this world's spirituality*. Daniel cannot remain content with Christianity providing answers in the afterlife; he must find spiritual understanding in the here and now. Judaism appeals to Daniel because the religion provides worldly strategies to achieve transcendent comprehension. As the narrator says,

> We fall on the leaning side; and Deronda suspected himself of loving too well the losing causes of the world. . . .But how and whence was the needed event to come?—the influence that would justify partiality, and making him what he longed to be yet was unable to make himself—an organic part of social life, instead of roaming in it like a yearning disembodied spirit, stirred with a vague social passion, but without fixed local habitation to render fellowship real? To make a little difference for the better was what he was not contented to live without; but how make it? It is one thing to see your road, another to cut it.

Much earlier than the revelation of Daniel's Jewish origins, Eliot portrays Daniel as having a noble desire to improve the world. While Daniel understands the potential futilities that accompany such a feeling, he also knows that despite these frustrations, he must follow his chosen way, when he discovers it. But the narrator refers to him as "a disembodied spirit" because he cannot define his spiritual frame of reference. The final metaphor of the passage, about Daniel's seeing and cutting his road, suggests to achieve his goals, Daniel must be illuminated by a certain everyday being-in-the-world ("fixed local habitation") that centers him. Paradoxically, his "centeredness" comes by the means of being marginalized in a minority culture. This centering must be both physical and spiritual.

According to the narrator, Daniel's nature hints at a special combination of qualities that permit him to move from the immediate to the universal:

> I have said that under his calm exterior he had a fervour which made him easily feel the presence of poetry in everyday events; and the forms of the *Judengasse*, rousing the sense of union with what is remote, set him musing on two elements on our historic life which that sense raises into the same region of poetry;—the faint beginnings of faiths and institutions, and their obscure lingering

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> decay; the dust and withered remnants with which they are apt to be covered, only enhancing for the awakened perception the impressiveness either of a sublimely penetrating life, as in the twin green leaves that will become the sheltering tree, or of a pathetic inheritance in which all the grandeur and the glory have become a sorrowing memory.

This "poetic" faculty bestows upon Daniel the ability to see through discrepancies in daily phenomena. As he walks through the Jewish neighborhood, he encounters a series of unsavory characters. The text implies that he does not condemn these random figures, in part because he understands the various historical conditions that create them. Additionally, as he interprets the decay around him, he considers the spiritual possibilities. The poet in him—the spirit, perhaps—allows him to weigh the competing meanings present in the scene. Daniel simultaneously sees both the potential for sublime glory (and the opportunity for spiritual renewal) and permanent decay. Still unsure of his own spiritual roots, surrounded by a history that can be read as vibrant or dying, his poetic faculty, according to the narrator, prevents the typical kind of stereotyping one might see from a British gentleman. In the process, he receives an education that is more than the simple acquisition of knowledge, rather, Daniel the poet acquires ways to comprehend knowledge.

At this point, these observations—that of the Jew as poetic history or as Western decline—hold each other in check. Although Daniel has been raised to regard Judaism suspiciously, his instincts permit him to reserve judgment. At the end of his philosophic contemplations and physical perambulations (through the Jewish section of Frankfurt), Daniel enters a shul, and we further sense the dissonance between his admiration for Jewish custom and his own British sensibility. The service moves Daniel powerfully, as the setting, the prayers, and the spiritual material alert him to Judaism's seemingly everlasting yet tortured history:

> The Hebrew Liturgy, like others, has its transitions of litany, lyric, proclamation, dry statement, and blessing; but this evening all were one for Deronda: the chant of the *Chazan's* or Reader's grand wide-ranging voice with its passage from monotony to sudden cries, the outburst of sweet boys' voices from the little quire, the devotional swaying of the men's bodies backwards and forwards, the very commonness of the building and the shabbiness of the scene where a national faith, which had penetrated the thinking of half the world, and moulded the splendid forms of that world's religion, was finding a remote, obscure echo—all were blent for him as one

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> expression of a binding history, tragic and yet glorious. He wondered at the strength of his own feeling; it seemed beyond the occasion—what one might imagine to be a divine influx in the darkness, before there was any vision to interpret.

This conversion narrative depicts Daniel entering into the mystical qualities of the Jewish faith, elevating normally mundane experience into something transcendent. His observations range from the reader to the choir, from the impassioned physical movements of the worshipers to the ordinary architecture of the shul, and from the downtrodden tableau to the religions of the world. Without knowing Hebrew, Daniel nonetheless absorbs these contraries and emerges with a somewhat overwhelming spiritual feeling. Here, Eliot seems to set him up to embrace the Jewish religion.

But his brief movement towards the sublime gets muted by the touch of a fellow worshiper who inquires about Daniel's parentage. Daniel sternly tells the fellow "I am an Englishman." Apparently, a poet can only temporarily separate his Englishness from his spiritual inclinations. Whatever divinity, spirituality, or historical power Daniel initially feels he converts into a retreat, into a British identity that distances him from Judaism. While Daniel safely operates in the mainstream, he feels the spiritual appeal of Judaism. But this same appeal threatens his protected place in the majority. To give in to these emotions would mean abandoning power.

As in many of Eliot's novels, marriage serves as a possible location for renewal, both personal and societal. Through relationships, Eliot devises the microcosmic possibility of uniting diverse cultures to enrich the larger society, and here, if we trace Gwendolyn or Daniel's stories, we discover Eliot depicts different versions of spiritual awakening. Daniel has already succeeded in establishing his value in the majority culture. To improve that culture, he must allow his spiritual sensibility to transcend his worldly self-knowledge. His spiritual sensibility will materialize from his eventual adoption of the minority culture from which he was, ironically, adopted out. But the dominant culture, as primarily represented by the "Gwendolyn Harleth" story, will emerge, ironically, as deeply in need of spiritual repair. Daniel aggressively embraces the religion of his biological origin; Gwendolyn slowly shifts her self-centered perspectives. If change was to occur—if the minority culture was to have a real impact on the majority—then the Gwendolyns of the world had to turn from their entrenched positions.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Gwendolyn initially thinks only of her needs in relationships. Her self-centeredness does not allow her to comprehend the spiritual component of her life. Like other Eliot female characters—Hetty Sorrel (*Adam Bede*) and Rosamond Vincy (*Middlemarch*)—she has a socially pleasing exterior. Also like these heroines, the possessive male gaze tends to objectify Gwendolyn by defining her as a commodity. The narrator sums up this point well in the beginning of the novel:

> She had a *naive* delight in her fortunate self, which any but the harshest saintliness will have some indulgence for in a girl who had every day seen a pleasant reflection of that self in her friends' flattery as well as in the looking-glass. And even in this beginning of troubles, while for lack of anything else to do she sat gazing at her image in the growing light, her face gathered a complacency gradual as the cheerfulness of the morning. Her beautiful lips curled into a more and more decided smile, till at last she took off her hat, leaned forward and kissed the cold glass which had looked so warm.

The obvious parallels to the myth of Narcissus, whose mesmerizing sense of self leads to his death, abound here. Gwendolyn, who delights in her own beauty, also thinks that she can escape any troubles by relying on her looks as a last resort in case anything debilitating should happen. Vanity guides her throughout much of the novel, even when it comes to marrying a man who reflects her worst characteristics. After she rebukes a suitor, she despairingly declares to her mother, "I shall never love anybody. I can't love people. I hate them." The only image she can trust and love is the reflection that can only return a cold kiss.

Significantly, Eliot does not blame Gwendolyn for her self-absorption. Her narcissism has been encouraged by friends and by the dominant culture's valuing beauty in women above all other traits. For the narrator, "only the harshest saintliness" can condemn her for her feelings. This leaves Gwendolyn in a difficult situation: looking within or outside herself, she cannot find any escape from her culture's spiritual vacancy. In fact, the majority culture wants her to retain her superficial sense of self in order to confirm its own values. If Gwendolyn can imagine herself as a pristine commodity, then the culture can pride itself on the production and use of such commodities. For Gwendolyn to reject these values would threaten basic cultural assumptions, although her willingness to question her status opens up a potential for reform. Daniel, and what his evolving Jewish sensibility represents, offers a possible alternative.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

External appearances and deeply held superficial cultural values can be challenged through the minority positions available to the characters.

Eliot stresses the term "naive" when it comes to describing Gwendolyn's narcissism and points to the direction the novel will take regarding relationships, community, and spirituality. At all times, any view that enshrines the individual as the center of existence is spiritually "naive" because Eliot reveals individuals as far too tragic to exist alone in their exposed vulnerabilities. The narrative's spiritual perspective, in fact, demands that one's vulnerabilities be the place where transcendent contemplation can occur. When Henleigh Grandcourt woos Gwendolyn, although she feels generally repulsed, she comes to consider the prospect of marriage in terms of how it might affect her freedom: "This subjection to a possible self, a self not to be absolutely predicted about, caused her some astonishment and terror: her favourite key of life—doing as she liked—seemed to fail her, and she could not foresee what at a given moment she might like to do."

She then calculates the positive and negative aspects of marrying Grandcourt, using only self-benefit to assess her fortunes. Ironically, the novel opens with a scene of Gwendolyn at the roulette wheel, gambling her money away; now she looks at marriage in terror, as if making this gamble would completely and forever disrupt her idea of personal autonomy. Both in gambling and marriage, Gwendolyn loses control, yet in gambling she chooses to lose control because of her sense of personal freedom. However, the idea that individuals can completely control themselves is, as Eliot implies, a time-honored illusion. The very first words of the novel, "Men can do nothing without the make-believe of a beginning," suggest how individuals try to control their histories and define their origins. But Eliot knows that life is much more like Gwendolyn at the roulette wheel than Gwendolyn controlling her destiny. Lacking a sustained critique of her smug individualism, she eventually accepts Grandcourt's proposal and orients herself, through marriage, toward unhappiness. All her calculations of earthly satisfaction lack any consideration of spiritual fulfillment. The novel does not want Gwendolyn to embrace an institutionalized religion that would stifle her awareness, but it does portray a character whose lack of spiritual insight, in part, results in her earthly fall.

If Gwendolyn is spiritually undeveloped, how does the novel suggest nurturing her gradual evolution? She does have positive attributes. In a world where women are viewed as commodities, she sticks fiercely to her opinions and endeavors not to accept any situation she finds untenable. To a certain extent, the quotation about her hating people demonstrates

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

not only her selfishness but also her ego's strength, which, in many ways, permits her to navigate in a clearly defined social sphere, though these definitions at times are illusory and limited. Unfortunately, for Gwendolyn, the world is not completely constructed of mirrors; thus, when she meets Daniel's critical eye in the gambling hall, she loses her nerve; when confronted with the prospect of marrying someone she clearly does not love, she succumbs to society's pressure. But when fortunes drive her out of her hermetic self, she gradually understands the meaning of Daniel's spiritual transformation.

Daniel and the many Jewish characters offer compelling contrasts to Gwendolyn's world. Toward the middle of the novel, Daniel saves Mirah Cohen from killing herself, and she begins a new life with the Meyricks. As Mirah transforms from a depressed, needy person into a talented, complex individual, Daniel, whose contact with the Jewish world has been limited, learns and grows. Eliot comments on the meaning of Daniel's relationship with Mirah:

> Deronda saw these consequences as we see any danger of marring our own work well begun. It was a delight to have rescued this child acquainted with sorrow, and to think of having placed her little feet in protected paths. The creature we help to save, though only a half-reared linnet, bruised and lost by the wayside—how we watch and fence it, and dote on its signs of recovery! Our pride becomes loving, our self is a not-self for whose sake we become virtuous, when we set to some hidden work of reclaiming a life from misery and look for our triumph in the secret joy—"This one is the better for me."

Here the narrator's assessment of Daniel differs quite radically from her earlier assessment of Gwendolyn. Daniel defines his life, momentarily, in terms of the one he has saved. This moment speaks powerfully to a worldly spirituality that Daniel unknowingly unlocks. His actions square precisely with the demands that Judaism places on an individual. Daniel implicitly understands that his behavior not only determines his position in the world, but in general defines the society within which he participates. He could turn his back on the weak and the needy. But Daniel represents a generosity whereby a noble society could be defined through how it treats its most impoverished members. Daniel has stumbled onto a situation that offers him a spiritual structure—a structure that involves the giving up of self for the betterment of others—that would lend clarity to most of his instincts and feelings. "The secret joy" the narrator

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

alludes to refers to the emotional aspect of becoming spiritual. Here a connection has been forged between an ethical action in the world and the establishment of a community through charitable relationship.

Daniel's decision to save Mirah recognizes the ultimate importance of life and how community intervention can improve society through beneficence. Yet these acts cannot stop at an ethics of behavior, because ethics have or do not have a political component. "Doing the right thing" does not always translate into political advantage for the doer of the good deed. In fact, Daniel's conscious abandonment of his Christian upbringing politically disempowers him. Critics like Raymond Williams and Terry Eagleton have argued that Eliot concentrates on ethics at the expense of politics. But I contend that by emphasizing the spiritual element, Eliot attempts to unite politics and ethics. Jewish spirituality can be achieved by performing righteous acts for others in this world. Furthermore, the establishment of Israel is at the heart of much of the Jewish discussion in the novel. This nation, ostensibly, would attempt to link politics to spiritual practice and ethics. As for Daniel, his spiritual transformation begins not with grand philosophical or religious gestures, but with a courageous act of helping another person.

In Daniel's mind an equal exchange may have occurred between Mirah and him, but a tremendous relocation, on Daniel's part, ignites the relationship between these two. Who is to say that he was not the tenth person who passed Mirah that day? And what would the ramifications be, in the novel's world, if he did not save her? After all, Daniel could simply continue with his life without tending to a person obviously from a lower social class. Furthermore, while Daniel has the power to abandon her, she has the power to bring him down, to impoverish him morally. Mirah's gaze, while spiritually empowering Daniel, as seen in the above quotation, would easily abandon him if he abandons her. Daniel's spiritual insight depends on his action. After Daniel decides to help, a certain kind of spiritual responsibility takes hold that, if not met, could become a larger burden. Daniel commits himself to a kind of behavior that brings good into the world. These good acts theoretically energize the Jewish community where Daniel will turn his support. Although Daniel wavers between the Jewish and gentile English worlds, he unites the two by embracing the good and recognizing the spiritual dimension of earthly existence. Earthly spirituality does not have to remain in the sole possession of the Jewish people.

Daniel's curiosity about Judaism and his concern for Mirah lead him to the Jewish part of town and his discussions with Mordecai. A deeply spiritual Jewish man, Mordecai provides Daniel with alternatives to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

explore the confusing ideas of self-construction and the meaning of relationship:

> Nay, it was conceivable that as Mordecai needed and believed that he had found an active replenishment of himself, so Deronda might receive from Mordecai's mind the complete ideal shape of that personal duty and citizenship which lay in his own thought like sculptured fragments certifying some beauty yearned after but not traceable by divination.

While Mordecai believes that Daniel represents some divine visitation meant to revive Mordecai's spirits, Mordecai's discourse edifies Daniel. Mordecai asks Daniel if he is of Jewish heritage. At first Daniel vehemently denies any possibility of Jewish origin—recalling the earlier scene where Daniel proclaims his Englishness in the synagogue. But as time goes on and Mordecai teaches him about Judaism and its meanings, Daniel's own desire for clarifying his origin intensifies, and he grows less hostile to the idea of being born of Jewish parents. Furthermore, while Daniel cannot quite identify what draws him into Jewish culture, he can see the tantalizing glimmers in his discussions with Mordecai. Mordecai seems transcendently spiritual; Daniel helplessly submits himself to his will and power. Submission to such will would be simple if that person were a learned professor, thinks Daniel to himself later, but Mordecai, perhaps unconsciously, represents fragments of Daniel's past and even more powerfully represents important pieces of Daniel's developing spiritual worldview. Mordecai, in a sense, sets Daniel on a spiritual/political quest. Daniel learns the unquestionable importance of other cultures in his discussions with Mordecai: Jews believe that an individual's redemption requires good, earthly deeds, and one can learn from past mistakes. But in order to operate in the world, one must abandon selfish positions and learn to help others through action. These actions make sense in some sort of grand cosmic scale, but, in the end, humans can only interpret their actions from limited perspectives. Yet even with these limited perspectives, achievements that benefit others benefit the community.

Near the time of Mordecai's death, Daniel listens to Mordecai's evolved sense of community: "For I have judged what I have written, and I desire the body that I gave my thought to pass away as this fleshly body will pass; but let the thought be born again from our fuller soul which shall be called yours."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Spirituality in everyday life involves responsibility and transmission, and this responsibility may not always be fairly distributed. Invoking cabalistic doctrine, Mordecai proclaims that his thoughts will be carried on by Daniel. One man and another may share information, but if the exchange stops there, little edification of society transpires. Mordecai reminds Daniel of the inextricable link between soul and body, a link so profound that, though bodies may pass from the earth, the soul remains in the ideas and actions of others who have been part of their lives. These conditions vividly emphasize Judaism's material/spiritual mix. Judaism recognizes that death, or entrance into the traditional world of spirits, should not end an individual's philosophical or spiritual work on earth. Through Daniel's dedication, Mordecai's heart and soul remain alive, informing others, though his body has passed away. If Daniel continues Mordecai's spiritual and philosophical explorations, then he can develop a spiritual awareness among others. Ultimately, at least according to Mordecai's vision, both Christians and Jews will profit from the minority culture's "incursion" into the majority.

Eliot does not write *Daniel Deronda* to proselytize about the benefits of Judaism. Instead, she complexly depicts a significant minority culture within the British empire who, for too many reasons, had been subjugated by prejudice and ignorance. Due to bigotry and ethnocentrism, the enriching worldly spirituality that Judaism promotes had been largely overlooked within the majority British culture. *Daniel Deronda*, a traditional English novel written by a renowned member of the English literati, becomes the site for a detailed explication of Jewish spiritual practices and customs. Judaism's ancient culture reached back into tradition and, because Jews had been mostly marginalized, their practical survival within Christian societies looked forward into modernity. Eliot found in this minority culture an ideal ethical system already realized in the world.

The confrontation between majority and minority practice becomes even clearer when Daniel meets Leonora Halm-Eberstein, his Spanish/Jewish mother. In their discussion, she justifies having raised him as an English gentleman. Her discourse represents the majority. Daniel thinks of her speech as "conscious representation, experience immediately passed into drama." Daniel had earlier said, "I wonder whether one oftener learns to love real objects through their representations, or the representations through the real objects." But it is not representation; it is misrepresentation. What Daniel must discover is his Jewish heritage. He cannot just merely join the minority culture. In this case, he cannot completely abandon his Christian upbringing, just as he cannot transform entirely into a Jew (which he informs Mordecai). But

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the new Daniel, emboldened by his acceptance of the minority discourse, represents the spiritual possibility for British citizens who would recognize Judaism's cultural and spiritual value.

Moreover, Daniel's responsibility—to translate Mordecai's untranslatable fictions—marks his entrance into a spiritual world that retains a sense of mystery and doubt. If Judaism manifests the spiritual through ethical action, then Daniel's intellectual bequest might be interpreted as limiting his abilities to convert his spiritual awakening into political action. That is one reason why he leaves England in a proto-Zionist attempt to seek out his roots and help establish a "political existence" for the Jews. As Mordecai demonstrates at the Hand and Banner, virtually all of his philosophy and spirituality is connected directly to the idea of a Jewish homeland. Rather than spend years deciphering complex spiritual codes, Daniel realizes that Mordecai's true commandment relies on Daniel's political commitment. Daniel cannot convert to the idea of scholarship; he can convert to the idea of nation-founding. Although he recognizes this as a long and difficult journey, it is the only journey worth his effort. In his heart, Daniel feels that hierarchies must change to accommodate a spiritually informed politics.

Outwardly, nineteenth-century England, like other European cultures, did not have much confusion about societal hierarchies. English society generally relegated Jews to peripheral positions and locations, where they lived and worked together. Nevertheless, Victorian Jews were often represented, both positively and negatively, in magazines, journals, cartoons, and newspapers. Prominent Jews like the Rothschilds, Sassoons, and Montefiores were often profiled and Jews, as Gideon states in the novel, achieved "political equality." Additionally, Benjamin Disraeli, the Prime Minister and author who converted from Judaism to Christianity, received much scrutiny, both positive and negative, about his Jewish heritage. Nonetheless, Jews still existed in the background, even in the literature of the period—Fagin, one of Dickens's few Jews, is an auxiliary character. Eliot took a different approach in *Daniel Deronda*. For her, the presence of the Jews built until that presence finally became a central issue. Daniel Cottom, in *Social Figures* (1987), argues convincingly how the individual in *Daniel Deronda* is subordinate to the social dramas that construct the individual. In this way, a society depends on fruitful cultural interactions that produce strategies of interdependence for its members. Judaism, as a marginal part of the greater culture, reorients its adherents and others affected by its philosophy. Most problematic for Eliot, then, was the general dismissal of minority cultures, like Judaism, which conflicted with mainstream conceptions of community and ethics.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Eliot chose this representation, in part, because her knowledge of Jewish lifestyles and teachings suggested powerful, yet practical revisions to the majority culture. Ideas about prejudice, difference, and cultural perspective deconstruct as Daniel's conventional Christianity gradually transforms into an unconventional Jewish perspective.

Historically, Victorian society could not assimilate an entrenched, albeit minor, Jewish population. According to Cecil Roth, in *A History of the Jews in England* (1964), there were about sixty-five thousand British Jews in 1880. This number tripled over the next twenty-five years. Jews for Eliot represented a partial solution to the country's spiritual crisis rather than a problem. In *Daniel Deronda*, she contemplates the question of Jewish nationalism from a Jewish perspective. That is, for British Jews, their proto-Zionist goals conflicted with their desire to assimilate. Eliot analyzes these desires in reference to the Jewish presence in the majority culture. So rather than Jews representing a force that threatened the larger community, as Katherine Linehan and Susan Meyer suggest, they represented an important element that would weaken English society *if they left*. Although Jews illustrated that part of culture often seen as different, foreign, and threatening to the main body of British society, British society required their presence. Along these lines, Mark Wohlfarth offers a compelling nationalist and political hypothesis:

> The Jewish-nationalist plot of Daniel, a revision of the classical *Bildungsroman* along nationalist lines, functions in many ways as a narrative and symbolic solution to Eliot's emphasis on continuity as well as rupture. That solution, however, given that Daniel *is* Jewish, remains irrecuperable for English nationalist purposes and thus necessitates the modulation of *Jewishness* into an idea of *Judaism* that could speak to the moral and nationalist concerns of England.

I agree with Wohlfarth's assessment of the novel as it relates to the political conditions of England. I contend, though, that Daniel's movement out of England reflects the precarious spiritual condition of the country. England, finally, cannot be a place for Daniel or, for that matter, Judaism. The English needed this minority population to help examine their own majority spiritual convictions during a time where science, industrialism, progress, and colonialism threatened the spiritual fabric of the nation. But Daniel sees his quest, like Arthur's perhaps, to found a nation where spirituality and community can simultaneously take root. Eliot was not being ironic when she titled her final chapter "Fruit and Seed." In *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot in no way actively depicts the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

decay of British society from within due to actions by the minority Jews. Instead, the Jews symbolically represent what British society could become by embracing certain Jewish ideals. Judaism offered a spirituality and worldliness that traditional British society appeared to lack. A British imperialism that threatened the Jews thus emerges as the force that threatens all of society; and a Jewish nationalism emerges as a force which would benefit the world.

In her famous letter to Harriet Beecher Stowe, Eliot says,

> But precisely because I felt that the usual attitude of Christians towards Jews is—I hardly know whether to say impious or more stupid when viewed in the light of their professed principles, I therefore felt urged to treat the Jews with such sympathy and understanding as my nature and knowledge could attain to.

As even Eliot suggests, *Daniel Deronda* at times exaggerates these characterizations so the author can identify "universal" ideals through the Jewish characters. Yet this exaggeration emphasizes how the "Zionist part" imparts a fresh and innovative perspective. Aesthetically, Eliot had to use more generalizations in order to engage her late Victorian gentile readership. Stereotypes worked to her advantage as she positively redirected them to unveil a Jewish community that functioned at the highest level of spirituality and understanding.

The possibility for a certain kind of spiritual awakening makes Daniel's uncertain embrace of his biological culture worthwhile. In *Daniel Deronda*, the individual can ignite society through spiritual intervention, just as a minority discourse can offer society insight for future amelioration; the individual can also spiritually damage society, just as the minority discourse can threaten. In the novel, the minority literature opposes the dominant paradigms of its society. This opposing strategy makes *Daniel Deronda* powerful fiction. In appropriating the strategies of a minority literature, Eliot constructs a bi-cultural spirituality that combines politics and ethics. This spirituality relies on discovering and being faithful to one's heritage. While embracing the minority culture certainly is risky and perhaps, in Daniel's case, substantiates too easily the notion of biological origin, when that origin emanates from a minority culture with a compelling philosophy (more redemptive than the majority culture's), the voice of the minority must be heard. Daniel's return to his Jewish roots signals a rational ethics for the self *and* a confrontational politics for the dominant society.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Daniel Deronda constructs situations where unsatisfying orthodoxies unravel with the infusion of minority materials. By the late nineteenth century, Great Britain had dramatically changed and reformed its social structure. In *Daniel Deronda*, one finds promising spiritual perspectives that would enrich this reform. But Eliot cautions that such reform involved assertive steps outside of the mainstream. Daniel's self-imposed exile at the end of the novel, although done for powerful reasons, suggests that England, collectively, cannot exile its internal spiritual confusion. Symbolically, Daniel must prepare himself for failure and rejection. But his act of embracing a new spirituality and culture reflects Eliot's desire to energize the powerful yet spiritually flustered English nation.

This spirituality can be seen through the depiction of transcendent moments where Eliot uncovers human beings' connection to something greater within the quotidian. If life has more to offer than just material prosperity and daily survival, and if to be human is to ask spiritual questions, then to coexist with each other, learn from each other, and build on collective spirituality must be the way for society to become a greater place. Sadly, to be human is to know how moments of transcendent spirituality will fade; to know that some day the body will die. As readers, we should analyze where these moments of spiritual transcendence take us. In Eliot's representations of life, she allows her readers the opportunity to reflect upon examples of spiritual action. Worldly spiritual behavior becomes possible in *Daniel Deronda*. The novel suggests that a future can be constructed which links the ethical and the political. Such a combination would emphasize the good in the past and the good that must occur in the future. Moreover, and returning to the *Blackwood* article which began this essay, the seeking of personal spiritual enlightenment can create a world where science and religion coexist, each shedding light on the other. As anti-materialist as George Eliot was, her novels never self-righteously attacked religion or science. But she saw her world accommodating the latest great idea to the detriment of previous great ideas. A functioning political and ethical world is large enough to include spiritual *and* material progress, because the greater good is emphasized. This greater good would provide guidelines for the kinds of scientific discoveries that would fit neatly into a paradigm that goes beyond Comte and Feuerbach to allow for exploration of not only the material, but the transcendent as well. Eliot did not want to fuel the debate between science and religion. In *Daniel Deronda*, she clearly demonstrates how majority and minority cultures can coexist peacefully; furthermore, the novel shows how these cultures can, perhaps, allow each other to flourish.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

KAREN WILKIN

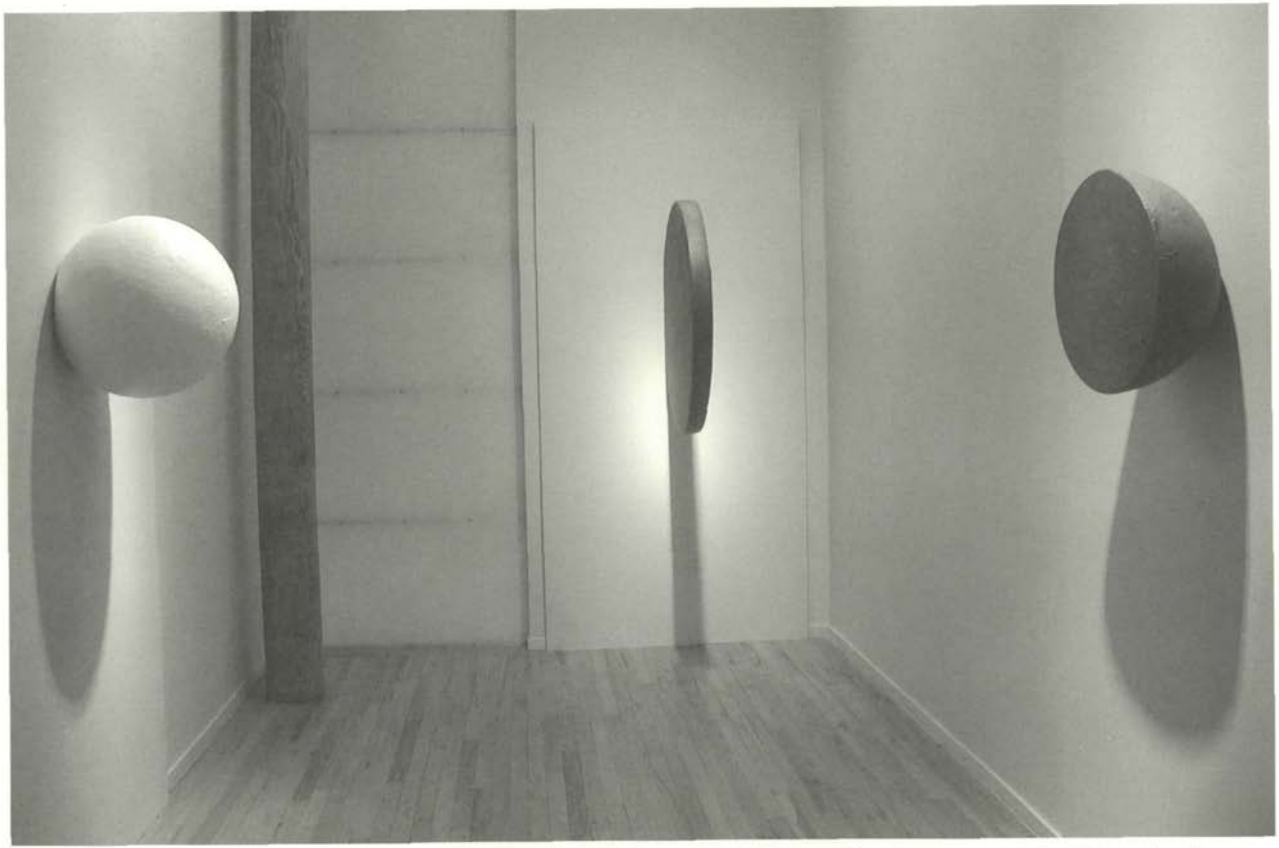
At the Galleries

THE MOST DISCUSSED SHOWS of the past season were—for very different reasons—*Vermeer and the Delft School* and *Jacqueline Kennedy: The White House Years*. These widely divergent blockbusters, one a paean to illuminating scholarship, the other a celebration of vicariousness and/or nostalgia, got most of the press and, to judge from the crowds at the Metropolitan Museum, most of the attendance, but there were plenty of other notable exhibitions in New York during the past few months, among them an impressive debut, a constellation of offerings by old pros and mid-career artists, and a couple of surprises. Let's start with the surprises.

At Cecilia de Torres Gallery, the Argentine-born, New York-based Eduardo Costa presented an elegant installation of recent "volumetric paintings." Chunky spheres and discs, plump triangles and rectangles, sometimes sliced or altered, appeared to thrust through the walls of the gallery or to hover against them. At first, these simple geometric solids seemed straightforward enough, but they became more elusive over time. Despite their economy, they seemed to question the premises of minimalism, and despite their bulk, they were curiously un-sculptural. Costa seems to subscribe to a modernist notion of painting as a flat surface covered with some hue; he substitutes real density and real spatial presence for the illusionism of traditional painting, so that flatness swells into mass, yet mass remains a visual, rather than tactile attribute. It's as though the "volumetric" works began life as brushy monochrome paintings, but wrenched themselves out of two dimensions into three in order to become chunks of dull primary colors or pristine black and white.

I had associated Costa with stylish, often ephemeral conceptual projects—the opposite end of the aesthetic spectrum from the literally and figuratively substantial, thoughtful structures at Torres. Yet according to a handsome, informative catalogue, Costa has made "volumetric" works since the mid-'90s, after he saw a lump of dried pigment in a can and decided that it was "a new kind of painting." (The earlier "volumetric" pieces included rather cartoonlike figurative constructions of lemons or flowers.) Whether Costa's recent "volumetric paintings"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



White Sphere with Black Core (2000), *Black Disc* (2000), and *Blue Half Sphere* (2000) by Eduardo Costa. Courtesy of Cecilia de Torres.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

radically reformulate the entire tradition of geometric abstraction, as Alexander Alberro maintains in the catalogue, or are simply logical extensions of that tradition—which seems closer to the mark—these uncanny, harmonious colored forms were hard to ignore.

Surprise number two was the advent in Soho of Culture, the New York affiliate of an established London gallery. It takes courage (or foolhardiness) to open an exhibition space on West Broadway while everyone else is moving to Chelsea, but the real surprise was Culture's second show, a ten-year survey of works by the British sculptor Stephen Cox, who is almost unknown in this country. Since 1986, Cox has spent a good deal of time in India, working in Mahabalipuram, where the tradition of carving devotional sculpture in stone has continued unbroken since the sixth century. He has also spent a good deal of time in Mahabalipuram's Tuscan equivalent, Pietrasanta, which still glories in the fact that Michelangelo selected marble from its quarries. As David Cohen points out in a perceptive catalogue essay, the multiple allegiances—to the archaic and to the classical in both its Eastern and Western sense—that are signified by these sojourns are palpable in Cox's work in stone.

Most of the sculptures at Culture were confrontational, deadpan, and relief-like. Cox examined the possibilities of likeness and difference in groups of elongated ovals, suavely carved into elegant convex forms and mounted on the wall. Breasts and genitals made some sculptures overtly suggestive of the human body, turning them into emblems of a kind of abstracted, multi-gendered sexuality. (Cox plays fast and loose with notions of hermaphroditism and androgyny—conflating the traditional forms of lingam and yoni is the least of it.) Other sculptures were allowed to provoke more unstable associations. *Space Invaders, 1996*, for example, first called to mind a scattering of schematic animal heads, like oversized fragments of some vanished Indus Valley civilization, but transformed itself into a cluster of potent torsos, a flight of bombs, and more.

Ambiguity seems essential to the effectiveness of Cox's work; too-literal carved faces marred some pieces. In the most satisfying sculptures at Culture, abstractness subsumed even the most complex allusions; the best of the wall-mounted ovoids read not as improvisations on particular body parts, but as distillations of the tumescent volumes of Hindu temple sculptures, in general; like their Indian antecedents, they seemed conceived in terms of voluptuous mass and surface, rather than anatomical logic. Cox further evoked Indian traditions by anointing parts of his sculptures' rhythmically pecked surfaces with oil or paint, striving to change the rough and dry to the sleek and mysterious, and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to transubstantiate heavy stone into floating bands of color. It was reassuring, in the present era of token "multiculturalism," to be presented with Cox's serious inquiry into fundamental issues of Eastern and Western sculptural traditions. Occasionally, he resorted to the obvious—a piece involving shiny steel pails and carved lotus blossoms, for example—but his strongest works seemed entirely self-sufficient, with a wealth of wide-ranging associations surrounding them like a halo.

As for the old pros: a traveling survey of Leon Golub's ferocious paintings made its final stop at the Brooklyn Museum. Organized by the Irish Museum of Art, Dublin, the show spanned an astonishing half century—1950–2000—of Golub's commitment to a personal brand of figuration, with emphasis on his gritty, politically engagé paintings of the past thirty years or so. The earliest works introduced a youthful, rather tentative artist whose contrarianism rapidly declared itself, beginning about the time of an extended stay in Europe in the late 1950s. (This is not to discount the importance of Golub's early connection with Chicago painting, with all its low-life overtones.) The formal origins of the political paintings were suggested by pivotal works from the late '50s and early '60s, a series that might be described briefly as "Abstract Expressionism goes to Ancient Rome." In these works, where clots, licks, smears, and swoops of paint momentarily and uneasily coalesced into monumental heads or heroic figures, Golub strove to fuse fundamental tenets of the vanguard abstraction of his formative years (he was born in 1922) with a profound admiration for the classical tradition, with mixed success. He soon found new ways of marrying method and meaning. The classicizing "friezes" of struggling nudes became politicized into what are probably Golub's best-known images: indictments of police brutality and urban violence, at home and abroad, and stylized accounts of war atrocities and the excesses of dictators, domestic and foreign. The most recent paintings in the show were protests against not social and political iniquities, but the advent of old age, composed of metaphorical images and explicit texts.

No matter how tied to recent events they may be, Golub's mature works remain deeply indebted to classical sculpture and to Renaissance and Roman fresco painting (think of the large figures who enact sinister rites on the dry red walls of the Villa dei Misteri). But sideshow posters and political protest banners also inform these pictures. Like their vernacular ancestors, Golub's huge images hang unstretched, as though ready to be rolled and re-installed wherever social consciences need prodding. His larger-than-life figures, some of them agonized victims, others terrifyingly powerful, seem flattened on to the surface of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

canvas, drawn with deceptive stiffness, verging on awkwardness, as though they moved with difficulty through the frightening dramas they enact. This apparent artlessness is reinforced by Golub's brutal painting method; he scrapes away pigment with a cleaver to create a dry, slightly abraded surface. Something of the cleaver's innate aggressiveness haunts the pictures, which seem weathered, maltreated. Longer acquaintance reveals how thoughtfully conceived Golub's compositions are, how carefully his protagonists are posed and characterized to make their actions utterly explicit, underscoring once again how much this painter of a disagreeable present owes to the classical past. Yet the chalky red backgrounds of his scenes of torture seem to have less to do with Pompeiian frescos than with blood.

The sources for Golub's political paintings are often news photos, although his most affecting pictures get to you as paintings, not as translations or enlargements of other images. (The exception was the exhibition's series of small portraits of dictators and strongmen, which seemed too obviously dependent on mass-media prototypes.) Inevitably, given the subject matter, I kept making mental comparisons with Max Beckmann's eloquent skewerings of modern horrors and decided, in the end, that I preferred the German painter's claustrophobic, oblique inventions to Golub's more direct assertions—which is not to belittle Golub. The best of his works sear themselves into your consciousness like a flash photo.

The power of Golub's paintings is attested to by their having transcended the Brooklyn Museum's installation. It was hard to decide which was more offensive: the way some wretched designer aestheticized the painter's threatening blood red, using it to line passages between galleries and to embellish labels and text panels; the amount of verbiage on those labels and panels; or the condescension of the texts. The perpetrators apparently feared that the meaning of Golub's explicit images would be unintelligible without wads of information about Southeast Asian conflicts, Latin American politics, and the history of race relations—which makes you wonder whether anyone on Brooklyn's staff ever looked at the pictures. At the entrance to the show, one panel announced that even though the curator had written an "explanation" for each picture, the strong content of Golub's work would provoke individual reactions in each viewer, so places to write those reactions were thoughtfully provided throughout. It was good to be told that museum-goers were allowed to respond to works of art individually, but Golub deserves better. *Anyone* does.

For sheer stubbornness and eccentricity, Sidney Tillim's recent paintings at Trans-Hudson Gallery rivaled anything in Golub's show. Tillim,

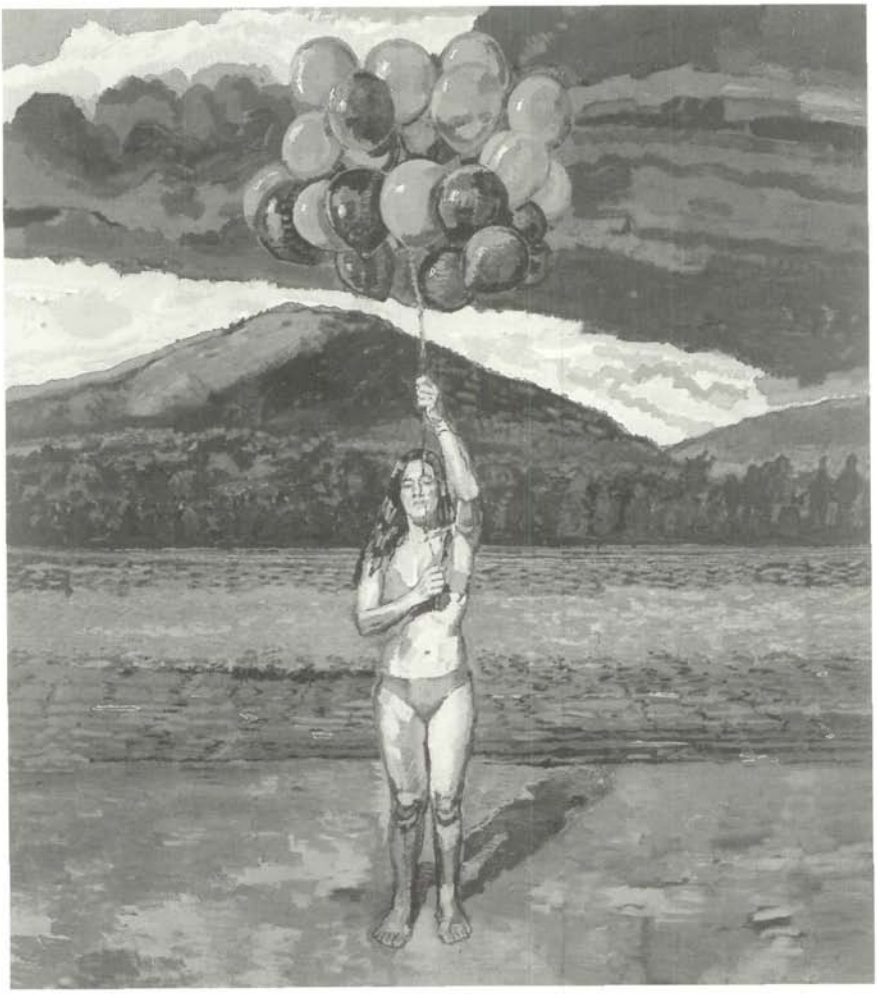
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

who at seventy-six is three years Golub's junior, has been a prickly presence in the New York art world for decades, both as a critic, known for crisp, sharply observed, informed writings, and as a painter. As a painter, over the years, he has reconsidered Grand Manner history painting—he is the author of works with themes ranging from a marbles championship to "Count Zinzendorf Spared by the Indians" to "Rabbi Gordon Examines an Injured Chicken"—and explored the permutations of a cool, almost impersonal brand of abstraction. A few years ago, he produced a memorable series of radiantly colored paintings using methods designed to distance the hand. (Tillim is immensely knowledgeable about, among many other things, arcane aspects of what Walter Benjamin would call "mechanical reproduction.") His recent show, which marked a return to "hand-painting" and traditional themes, was a selection of oddball narratives, some based on a version of actuality, some invented, that appeared the result of filtering modern mass-media imagery through the tradition of minor Victorian genre painting. Or something like that. Several were based on remembered scenes from classic movies, while the two best works in the show were provoked, respectively, by a perfectly pitched, no-hit baseball game and a murder.

Weird as it all sounds, postmodern irony was clearly not the issue. (Some perplexed critics compared the paintings to outsider art or amateur efforts, while acknowledging their sophistication.) There is plainly an element of pure crankiness in these pictures, but Tillim says he does them because he enjoys painting furniture, patterned rugs, fabrics, flowers, and the like. I suspect that's true, since the most compelling thing in almost any picture was frequently his adroit deployment of props: for example, the fallen chair, the bouquet of lilies (as a *repoussoir*), the nifty fire screen, or the space of a hallway that competed for attention with the corpse of the victim and her bemused killers in *Modern Crime*, or *The Death of Irene Silverman*. Like the nineteenth-century genre paintings they conjure up, Tillim's pictures demand to be read as sequences of loosely associated, often deliciously painted details linked by an overriding story—except for the baseball picture, which was a triumph of explosive energy, sunlit grass, and stripey uniforms. As the work of a young artist (or one less intelligent than Tillim) these works might have seemed fashionably cynical or simply incomprehensible. As it was, for all their unabashed peculiarity—including some of the most (deliberately) ham-handed drawing to be seen anywhere—they were strangely convincing, fresh, rewarding in terms of sheer painting, and, it turns out, hard to forget.

Uptown, at Salander-O'Reilly Galleries, another type of obsessiveness declared itself in the paintings of Graham Nickson. Like Golub,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Balloon Woman (2001) by Graham Nickson. Acrylic on canvas. 108 by 96 inches. Courtesy of Salander-O'Reilly Galleries.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Nickson pays homage to quattrocento frescos in his canvases, creating vast images of a dreamlike, seaside world populated by characters who move from picture to picture, in ever-changing combinations and with slight variations in gesture, stance, and action. You come to know a woman with balloons and one emerging, flamelike, from a beach towel, or a man folding a beach chair and one clambering down from a lifeguard's perch. Like people in an Antonioni movie, they appear disconnected from one another, each about to depart for a separate place. The mood is slightly melancholy, the weather, a little airless.

It all derives from scrupulous, passionate observation, but in the finished paintings, which can take years to evolve, Nickson has so disciplined his perceptions, in his effort to reveal the innate geometries that link the animate and the inanimate, that time seems to have stopped. Yet his heightened, astringent color suggests specific times of day. Mouth-puckering greens, tart oranges, and acidic yellows, set off by deep violets, juicy reds, and pinks that teeter on the edge of vulgarity evoke sunset or sometimes dawn. The strange color, combined with the stylized poses and gestures, exiles Nickson's images from the particular and resettles them in the realm of private myth or inexplicable ritual. But what finally saves these beach scenes from sentimentality or bombast is their being as much about the pacing of geometric vertical elements against big horizontal zones as they are about narrative.

I've come to think that because of Nickson's evident single-mindedness, the cumulative effect of seeing his work over a period of years may be more interesting than any single picture can be, no matter how good it is. One of the strongest works at Salander-O'Reilly was a haunting "departure" picture that commanded attention not only for its own merits, but because it seemed to summarize the implications of the series to date. "So that's what he's been getting at!" I thought. This is not to underestimate the exhibition's most unprecedented picture, an enormous landscape of a looming hill with silhouetted trees. It plainly derived from Nickson's ongoing series of sunrise and sunset watercolors, which are painted rapidly from direct observation, although there was nothing direct about the vast, mysterious canvas. Like the beach pictures, with their magically stilled clouds of threatening birds and frozen gestures, it suggested not nature, but some archetype—the Ur-sunrise, before the world was populated with the self-contained figures that inhabit the unstable places where land and water meet.

While Nickson was painting sunrises and sunsets, the German-born, New York-based David Stern has been riding the subway and using this unlovely necessity of city life as the trigger for inventive,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

slightly unsettling images. Stern has been exploring urban experience for several years (along with a continuing series of portrait heads and full-length figures), in densely loaded, sensuously stroked pictures that seem to fluctuate between acute perception and whole-hearted abstraction, without compromising either. Confronting one of Stern's large figure groups is like glimpsing something out of the corner of your eye or half-seeing someone who jostles you as he rushes past, but it is also like being forced to consider the essential nature of painting itself. Stern's urgently worked surfaces appear to have gathered themselves together long enough to suggest a fleeting observation, before subsiding into being the raw materials of painting once again. Conversely, the logic of a play of apparently improvisatory light and dark patches or the orchestration of subdued, unnameable hues lit by flickering brights, turns out to be linked to the structural logic of a crowded street or a gathering around a table. Stern's drawings similarly tread the boundary between pure mark-making and perception.

Stern's newest work, seen at Rosenberg and Kaufman, in two locations—paintings in their Soho gallery and drawings on 57th Street—gave new meaning to the phrase "Subway Series" with their suggestion of hermetic interiors populated by crowds of figures, some ganged together on seats, others apparently about to step beyond the confines of the canvas, the whole animated by rapid, overscaled gestures that implied that his protagonists were in motion. If it sounds artful or tricky, think again. Like all of Stern's work, these were deeply felt, intelligent pictures driven in equal measure by the painter's passionate belief in the expressive potency of his medium and his alertness to the day-to-day experience of being a particular individual in a particular place—domestic baggage, casual encounters, the dislocation of being (like Nickson) a transplanted European, and all the rest of it. In his best work, out of an unlikely combination of transient imagery and assertive materiality, Stern constructs pictures that embody not only his distance, as an observer, from the quotidian, but also his participation in his adopted city.

Like Stern, the Polish-born painter Wlodzimierz Ksiazek (who has been a U.S. resident since 1988) deals with private notions of displacement, the grittiness of modern life, and the physical presentness of paint; like Golub, Ksiazek is an angry painter who gives vent to firmly held beliefs about social injustice and the iniquities of recent history. Unlike either of his colleagues, he is a wholly abstract artist, relying on painterly strategies and processes as carriers for his deepest feelings and most intense convictions.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Ksiazek's recent works, seen at Kouros Gallery, both continued and expanded an ongoing series in which he builds, destroys, and "heals" dense, almost brutal surfaces. His palette ranges from chalky, bleached earth tones to saturated blues, occasionally punctured by craggy whites or ominous reds. The initial gestures that build the surface are a rhythmic series of more or less vertical and horizontal, overlapping swipes, densely layered to the point of impenetrability in some, seemingly transparent and drippy in others. These "walls" of paint are then attacked. Portions are sliced and peeled away to reveal earlier states, although often there is a suggestion that the peeled-off layers have been reapplied, like bandages, or new elements inserted. These excavations and patchings retain the memory of the underlying structure; each mark reiterates the vertical and horizontal axes of the canvas. It's a time-honored way of organizing an abstract picture—the Cubist grid, *again*—yet for some reason, in Ksiazek's hands, this truing and fairing can also suggest architectural references. In some recent works, the sequence of events was less easy to read—events appeared to occur *on*, rather than in or under the surface (or perhaps not)—yet the effect of accumulated incident and, by extension, of lived experience, remained the same.

Ksiazek's pictures appear to be survivors; their dry, sometimes crusty surfaces are a little scarred and battered, but in the end, rewarding to the eye. The desire to read this as embodying notions of repression and escape, loss and retrieval, memory and suppression, physical (or ideological) violence, and the like, is almost irresistible. Yet while there are clearly potent metaphors at the heart of these works, it is not Ksiazek's private imperatives and discontents that make them arresting, but their painterly qualities—that is to say, his ability to translate his experience into wordless, physical, pictorial terms. When process seems to dominate, though, metaphor becomes irrelevant. In his best work, Ksiazek manages to walk a thin line between material expressiveness and overapparent process, so that the drama of his surfaces, the unpredictable shifts in his color and tonalities, along with the controlled energy of his touch, not only reward attention in themselves, but also trigger a host of associations. (Then you can come in close and try to figure out how he did it.) Scale is crucial, in terms of both the relation of the generating mark and the "excavation" to the whole canvas, and their relation to each other; the larger pictures were often the most successful. Ksiazek is a painter to watch.

After all this fierce urbanism, Melissa Meyer's exuberant abstractions at Elizabeth Harris seemed more than ever like summations of experience with nature. For some time, Meyer has made seductive works on

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

paper whose landscape mood seemed determined more by qualities of light and color than by allusion. Occasionally leaf-like or branch-like shapes declared themselves, but these references usually seemed more like homages to Matisse than descriptions of things seen. A loose-limbed geometry dominated. Meyer's large paintings have increasingly shared the improvisatory, calligraphic qualities of her paperworks; witness her recent show, in which her radiant, generously scaled canvases seemed as casual and direct as any of her watercolors.

Meyer constructs her pictures as off-hand checkerboards of rapidly brushed squares. Each zone has its own density and hue, so that her most engaging pictures seem to happen as you look: a vigorous twist of the brush here, a series of swirls there, a sweep of blue over *here* and an answering patch of warm brown in the next column. Overscaled strokes collide or mesh, depending on their degree of transparency. When they overlap, colors shift and visual weight is increased, simultaneously detaching the roughly rectangular zones of paint from reference and reinforcing their character as distinct entities. These islands of heightened density of material and hue are important. They throw things off in a helpful way, counteracting the risk, in the largest pictures, of uniform transparency's becoming mere thinness or of underlying's geometry's becoming rigid.

In the end, it's Meyer's light-drenched color that determines the impact of her paintings and locates them most securely in the natural world. At Elizabeth Harris, she explored a range of sun-struck, transparent yellows and ochres, and a gamut of greens as various as the colors of newly emerging leaves. (In this context, it was impossible not to read other chromatic colors as floral notes, which paradoxically made more visible Meyer's ultimate independence from nature and her debt to other art, especially to Matisse.) In the last few years, Meyer has increasingly pared down her images, as though trying to discover just how economically she could evoke a sense of the out-of-doors. The spare, energetic paintings in her recent show made me eager to see what she does next.

The debut? Jilaine Jones's bold, take-no-prisoners constructions at Salander-O'Reilly. Jones is the real thing: a sculptor who uses a rich material palette—plaster, wood, steel, string, and more—to explore three-dimensionality by dissecting, displacing, and reconfiguring chunks of air. The drama of her work depends on how things touch or the simultaneous likeness and unlikeness of a slender, round metal bar and a slab of weathered wood, the contrast of a suavely curved plaster volume and a curved charcoal line drawn across a flat plaster plane.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

That's All Right (2001) by Melissa Meyer. Oil on canvas. 60 by 50 inches. Courtesy of Elizabeth Harris Gallery.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The two largest works in the show were so greedy for space that they could have been described more as "places" than as "things." They demanded ample room in which to examine the formal relationships, across distances, of all manner of things, from furniture to (perhaps) people to landscape elements—not that any of this was literally or even casually represented. Yet the scale, rhythms, and visual weight of Jones's constructions made them feel like inhabited places, their inventive, surprising structures animated by the memory or the possibility of the body's presence. In one sense, the sculptures at Salander-O'Reilly were like abstract reconstructions of places that had just been vacated, while a single, massive, self-contained plaster, steel, and wood "figure" was like the symbol of one of the former inhabitants.

In the large works, both implied objects and the intervals between them were announced in terms of interchangeable solids and voids; spaces were sometimes made into tangible solids, while masses were dissected into skeletal "drawing." The result was an uncanny presentness and some of the most exciting work I've seen by a younger sculptor in a long time.

And more surprises: an idiosyncratically chosen selection of sculpture and drawings at Lori Bookstein Fine Art brought together works by well-known historical figures, current practitioners, the celebrated, the inexplicably under-appreciated, and the emerging. As I have come to expect from this independent-minded gallery, the show was full of unexpected pleasures ranging from Bruce Gagnier's introspective figures and the late Jonathan Silver's meditations on the essence of the head, to drawings by pioneers of American modernism. Worth the detour, as they say in Michelin.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

OBSERVATION

Spanish Scholars and London Therapists

Two conferences a month apart, requiring two transatlantic trips. Both meetings challenged taken-for-granted assumptions; at both the participants came from a variety of disciplines; and at both the contributions transcended their purported aims. The Spanish Association of American Studies, consisting mostly of American and Spanish academics, met in stupendous Salamanca. At the medieval university of this ancient town, they addressed the ins and outs of "Power and Culture: Forms of Interaction and Renewal." The Multilingual Psychotherapy Center's conference on "Lost Childhood and the Language of Exile," located in London's Hampstead, attracted participants from Hungary, Italy, Switzerland, Canada, the United States, Israel, France, and Londoners from Angola, South Africa, Serbia, Germany, Italy, and elsewhere. As expected, in Spain the preponderance of scholars interested in the United States lured an audience of academics in the humanities, literature, and departments of English, whereas in London most of the listeners consisted of therapists of all denominations, whose native languages were not English.

The organizers, Antonio Celada and Félix Martin Guiterrez in Spain, and Judit Szekacs in London, achieved their aims. The former anticipated updates on what goes on in the United States, the latter wanted to avoid the customary squabbles among psychoanalysts and psychologists, and to recreate the emotional closeness experienced in successful therapeutic one-on-one relationships among the one hundred and eighty people in the auditorium.

Ultimately, both conferences brought together individuals from a variety of cultures, and succeeded in achieving the frank, multicultural discussions they aimed for—not in the frequently clichéd manner, but by expanding the participants' consciousness, and in the process creating a community of friends. In Spain, this happened primarily on sightseeing walks and over meals, even though some participants allowed professional caution to override their impulses. In other words, some American scholars were careful of what not to divulge because, I assume, they feared what they said might get back to their own university, or might keep them from obtaining future invitations to international meetings.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And some Spaniards' rivalries among members of different universities occasionally could be sensed. But on balance, openness prevailed.

In London, a number of therapists as well would refrain from saying what colleagues of specific therapeutic convictions might find inadmissible. However, they were in the minority: most of the conference panelists themselves were immigrants, and have put their "marginality" to professional ends. They are in the habit of working in their native languages to help old and new settlers probe into the personal, emotional roots that exacerbate the humiliations and frustrations bound to face all individuals who are dropped, for whatever reason, into totally bewildering surroundings, and who have to function in a language whose idioms they do not fully comprehend. Such therapists rely on their own past experiences, using empathy and knowledge to facilitate the newcomers' integration. At our conference, this multi-level understanding bridged the cultural gaps among participants—many of whose parents also were of "mixed" backgrounds, such as Argentine/British, African/Hispanic, Israeli/Arab, and more.

In "Cultural Salamanca," it was the beauty of the town itself, its historic and imposing monuments, and the organizers' focused program that bridged our potential differences. In English and Spanish we were exposed to local as well as international music, were taken to the theater, and were shown the irreplaceable treasures of the ancient library that was started, as was Salamanca University, in the year 1218 (no more than six persons at a time may enter the inner sanctum, for no more than ten minutes, in order to maintain the proper temperature and humidity).

The participants stayed in a sixteenth-century monastery, which had been converted into a hotel. On our hobbled walks through town, we passed, for instance, the Casa de las Conchas, the Pontifica University, and the Castilla y Leon, which bear an uncanny resemblance to medieval Italian architecture. The grandeur of the Plaza Mayor almost seems to be a replica of Venice's Piazza San Marco. However, Salamanca is unique, insofar as all of its buildings are constructed out of the local, reddish-brown stone, and which overlook the lush Castilian plain. Yes, here too, new buildings are interspersed, but these fade into the background fairly discreetly.

I was struck, also, by the local students' eager pace to get to their classes on time—to acquire knowledge rather than prove attendance, or so I was told. Those among them who came to our conference seemed to speak more than passable English, although for the most part, they were too shy to publicly ask questions. Once again, I reflected upon

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

American students' deficiency in foreign languages, which, I believe, ends up furthering our country's isolation, and provincialism.

Alas, my own Spanish was not good enough to follow the panel discussions that were held in Spanish. The first day's presentations ran the gamut from, for instance, "Jack London's Spencerian Cage" and "Power and Culture in Babbitt" to "Power Relations and Southern Aristocratic Values," to "Cultural Interaction and Poetic Renewal: Williams on Cummings," and to "Mythologies of Power in Emerson and Whitman." That morning's plenary lecture was given by the Californian Emory Elliott, on "The Culture Wars and the Revenge of the Aesthetic," followed by a session on Afro-American Studies (this one in English), by a plenary lecture on Political Propaganda in the United States since 1945, and by a roundtable on Cultural Studies. That day ended with a first-rate piano recital by the young Milton Rúben Laufer in yet another magnificent, medieval auditorium—which was followed by a very late dinner.

The second day started with sessions on "Latinos and Native Dialogues," "Power and Culture in Hollywood," and "Visual Power and Culture" (with emphasis on Hollywood and on fiction). My own plenary lecture, "End of American High Culture?" was followed by a roundtable on Women's Studies, and a lecture by Michael Rockland on "The Europeanization of the United States." I was surprised that after my talk a number of Spanish participants approached me to say that I had been "brave" by coming out against what, in shorthand, we call political correctness. Some applauded my "courage"—for having done (with a bit of trepidation) what I thought I owed the organizers.

The last day began with "Visions of American Culture" by various Spanish contingents, which was followed by (immigrant) "Women's Selves." Hans Bak, who came from Holland, gave a lecture on "The Interplay of Race, Ethnicity, and Religion in Contemporary American Multicultural Literatures," and Linda Kauffman presented another one on "Old Art/New Masters: The Public Role of Artists and Intellectuals." Panels on "Visions of Masculinity" and on "Culture and Ideology" were succeeded by a lecture on "National Identity and Character in U.S.-Mexico/Mexico-U.S. Travel Narratives" by John Hazlett. Even a quick reading of the titles of these talks—their often exotic subjects and the takes on them—indicates the idiosyncratic ways of American culture, whether "high" or "low," and how these may appear to "others" whose countries' traditions and personal perspectives come into play.

Such personal perspectives were the meat of the London conference, as participants focused on some of the consequences in individuals'

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

minds—of whatever native language—after having lost their mother tongues. As Kathleen Kelley-Laine stated in her introduction, psychoanalysis is about translating psychic pain into language; and "how" one reaches the trauma that is located in the unconscious, how one gets to pour this anguish into a language that turns it into a transformative experience, is what counts.

Judit Szekacs had found that her Hungarian patients were able to trust her more readily than the analysts they had worked with previously, because they shared their native language. That was why she started London's Multilingual Psychotherapy Center (MLPC), which refers people to therapists who speak their languages—and are able more readily to recreate the cultural and emotional climate of their childhoods. As both therapist and patient, together, revisit and revive what was lost in transition, in the move from one culture and language into another, they are able to clear up at least some of the misunderstanding and non-understanding that then had occurred.

At previous international meetings of psychotherapists many individuals had told their stories. Now, they expected to draw conclusions from these stories, and to learn—via emotional rather than intellectual communication—how to truly connect with one another, and to create a feeling of kinship. They went on to ask what language they had best rely on to converse after verbal forms and structures have been lost and must be reconstructed; and in what domain of the soul they had best search to find words that have lost their meanings because they no longer carry their affective and emotional charge. Inevitably, Hungarian was the lingua franca of this soul language, not only because both Szekacs and Kelley-Laine were trained in the relatively emotional Ferenczien psychoanalytic tradition, but because they found out that their inferences struck a chord with everyone who had been uprooted in childhood. (Kelley-Laine is planning a follow-up meeting in Paris at the end of this year, another one was held in Budapest last February, and more may well follow later on.)

Exile, whether under circumstances of war, persecution, natural disaster, or other traumatizing events, entails a fundamental loss of identity. Kelley-Laine found that the panicked child inevitably seals off its "lost childhood" along with its "mother tongue." Like Peter Pan, she observed, the child gets locked up in the sort of "Neverland" of eternal youth, and gets "anesthetized," while a self that remains "young, innocent, and heartless" is being constructed. This early self can be refound, but given the initial trauma, this happens with much difficulty, and only in the transference relation. Clearly, Ferenczi's flexible and emotionally

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

oriented techniques are helpful. But insofar as the participants mentioned psychoanalytic theories at all, they did so in a laid-back manner, rather than in the controversial way we have gotten accustomed to in the debates among ego-psychologists, self-psychologists, Freud-bashers, defenders of Jungian, relational, classical Freudian, interactional, and all the other therapeutic denominations. The focus was on how to emotionally connect to patients, and to one another. The one hundred and eighty persons who had pre-registered identified themselves as counselors, analytical psychotherapists, trainees, psychiatrists, group psychotherapists, student counselors, senior lecturers, freelance writers, linguists, Jungian analysts, political analysts, lecturers, retired teachers, clinical linguists, language teachers, social workers, and translators. There also was a publisher, a mental health nurse, a law lecturer, a Portuguese education attaché, a professor of human geography, and a company director. What they all shared was an interest in, and most likely the experience of, exile—a childhood they needed to bring back to themselves, to reinterpret how they came from "there" to "here," and an urge to know what to tell their children about their origins.

All of the speakers had been thinking and talking about immigration and displacement for a long time; they, themselves, had been uprooted as children, some of them more than once, and only much later had dealt with the adjustments to their new language(s), and with the grief and humiliations they then had suppressed. But none of them saw themselves as victims, more as lucky survivors of unlucky circumstances: after all, they had overcome some of their pain, and had transformed it to succeed in what we call the real world. The majority of speakers, who were in (or aspired to) therapeutic occupations, were using their childhood trauma to help others with theirs. We even spoke of the advantages one gains when multilingual, of the expanded understanding that comes instinctively when crossing from one language to another. As children we could not know that, and felt only the hurts, the humiliations and embarrassments experienced as outsiders. And the stings, when classmates laughed at us, when we did not understand what was anticipated, or did not live up to expectations we had of ourselves.

On the first day of the conference the contributions remained primarily on an intellectual level, as the persons in this large gathering were feeling their way. On the second day, however, the ice was broken: speakers and audience now had the courage to talk from, what for want of a better formulation, were their hearts and souls. People now spoke out on what they still had trouble formulating. What better means, I kept reflecting, to learn that these Argentines and Angolans, Cubans

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and Canadians, Israelis and Iranians, as children, had conquered their unacknowledged fears by unconsciously displacing their reality in much the same way I had when fleeing from Hitler's Vienna. For fear and curiosity, urges to hide and to run, get intermingled in every child that doesn't understand the causes of the danger it senses and smells.

When we met at the Hungarian Cultural Center that evening to listen to the Auer Quartet play Mendelssohn and Bartok, we felt as if we had known the other participants all of our lives. We didn't really want to say good-bye, and resolved to continue exploring our multicultural, unconscious experiences at the next meeting of multilingual therapists. I think we were sure that by forming a community of exiles, we were beginning to replace the displacement and loss of language, emotion, and culture we had left so long ago.

Such experiences might well lessen the "Power of Culture" which many Europeans equate with the negative influence of American popular culture, and thus help restore the strength of individuals and of communities.

Edith Kurzweil

COMING SOON IN **PARTISAN REVIEW**:

- Liberty and the Politics of Identity: **David Sidorsky**
- **Arthur Berger** on Aaron Copland
- "The Necessity of Poetry" by **Kenneth Sherman**
- **Jan-Werner Müller** on German Intellectuals
- Reviews by **Daniel Hayes**, **Mark Bauerlein**, & **Robert Leiter**
- Fiction by **Sharona Ben-Tov**
- Poetry by **Doris Lessing**, **Mario Luzi**, & **Vénus Khoury-Ghata**

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Double Vision

From Dawn to Decadence: 500 Years of Western Cultural Life, 1500 to the Present. By Jacques Barzun. HarperCollins. $36.00.

"I have tried to write as I might speak with only a touch of pedantry here and there to show that I understand modern tastes." On the first page of this eight-hundred-plus-page volume, Jacques Barzun tells us not to expect the monumental. What he promises instead is an extended conversation about "the art and thought, manners, morals and religion and [their] social setting" of Western civilization during the past five hundred years. The author of more than thirty books, among them studies of Darwin, Marx, Wagner, Berlioz, and romanticism, Barzun in his nineties presents a remarkable summing-up of his learning and wisdom. I was one of his students at Columbia, and in reading this engaging book, I hear once again the voice of a master teacher: erudite, incisive, witty, and provocative. The pedagogical scene is not the lecture hall, but the seminar room, where I sat for the famous graduate course in cultural history which he normally gave with Lionel Trilling. The year I took it Trilling was on leave and Barzun was the sole pilot.

The audience assumed by this book is a liberally educated reader, who is not necessarily a specialist in any of the subjects, but has enough knowledge to be reminded of what is familiar and to be instructed by what is fresh and surprising. "Selective and critical" in his exposition, Barzun avoids the "neutral and encyclopedic." The title, I think, is somewhat misleading about where the strength of the book lies. Our modern history, according to Barzun, is marked by four revolutions in thought and action: the Protestant Reformation; the Monarch's Revolution that brought into being the nation-state; the Enlightenment that produced the French Revolution, which in turn produced romanticism; and our modern period, which begins with the Great War and the Russian Revolution. Although the book does end with a jeremiad about the decadence of our present condition, I did not experience, while reading it, a teleological tendency in that direction. Decadence is not a necessary conclusion to draw from the story or stories that Barzun tells. The book's strength is represented by what he says of one of his heroes, Walter Bagehot, best known for his classic study of the unwritten English constitution.

> [H]is singular genius derives from his double vision. In any conflict of persons or of ideas he was always able to see that neither side

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> was perverse or stupid, but had reasons for militancy; and he entered not only into these reasons but also into the feelings attached. This is a rare talent, especially when it does not lead to shilly-shallying in the double-viewer's own course of action. Bagehot could always state the reasons for *his* choices with the utmost clarity.

This can be said of Barzun himself. For the historian, judgment is action, and Barzun never shilly-shallies in his judgments.

Barzun has the rare capacity for seeing around an idea or institution in order to provide its historical logic, which might be antithetic to modern sensibilities. Consider, for example, his treatment of the subject of the doctrine of the divine right of kings. The monarchical revolution of the seventeenth century affirmed "monarchy-and-nation" as the basis of "stability and peace" at a time when "sects had challenged or broken authority everywhere." An altogether secular ruler was not at the time within the horizon of possibility.

> In the 17C no monarch could do without the support of the church, Protestant or Catholic. . . .At the Estates General of 1614, the bourgeois order made it Article I of their petition; they wanted the king's right to oppose papal interference and to put down the lords made explicit. . . .As for the people, they needed the comfort of divine right to replace the former means of protection against tyranny—local assemblies, customary privileges, and the like, which under monarchy were neutralized or swept away.

Barzun goes on to elaborate the theory of monarchical responsibility to God and the consequences of the king's betrayal of his trust, anticipating the atheist's contempt for such "empty imaginings" with the admonition that the atheist "should not fall into his own imagining that 'no sensible man' ever trusted this guarantee of right with perfect sincerity. When thinkers and populace agree in an interpretation of the world, it is foolish to suppose that they have lost their reason." One might add that though divine right has its reasons, even in its own time those reasons were challenged. (As is the case with most rules, there are of course exceptions: Germany lost her reason during the Nazi period.)

Barzun makes a similar case for Metternich's counterrevolutionary policy and practice in the wake of the French Revolution.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> Democratic hindsight should not prompt the thought that Metternich's policy of suppression was doomed from the start and that the monarchists were plain evildoers. To the question who wants another twenty-five years of war and revolution? the reasonable answer was nobody [a hyperbole]. The universal need was stability and peace, and there seemed no other recourse but Legitimacy; that is, the appeal to long-established forms and rulers. It was the common-sense position.

Question: Did Legitimacy have to take the Metternichian form? And, on the other end of the political spectrum: In responding to the French Revolution, its passions and its terrors, Barzun, consistent with his double view of past events, does not partake in the currently fashionable repudiation of it. He understands the reasons for its militancy and its enduring effects. Though he sympathizes with the romanticist reaction against the Enlightenment (its pragmatic feeling for concreteness and particularity) as a correction to the universalizing bias of the Enlightenment, he provides a scrupulous and generous account of Enlightenment ideas and aspirations. His presentations of Voltaire, Diderot, and other Encyclopedists are among the pleasures of the book. Here Barzun follows Burkhardt in his *Judgments on History*. "Our moral criticism of past ages can easily be mistaken. It transfers present-day desiderata to the past. It views personalities according to set principles and makes too little allowance for the urgencies of the moment," as does much of the postmodern practice of "historical" writing and literary criticism.

What to make of Barzun's thesis in the final section of the volume that we live in a time of decadence? Even his most sympathetic reviewers find it the most problematic part. First, we need to be clear about what Barzun means by decadence. It defines a time like our own when the absurd is no longer considered eccentric by the leading thinkers, artists, and writers in society, but has in fact become the norm; its defining philosophy is Existentialism. Although Barzun has little to say about postmodernism (Barthes, Derrida, Foucault, and Lacan are conspicuously absent from his discussion), it seems reasonable to infer that he views it as a belated version of existentialist bafflement at the incoherence of the world. (The difference between Existentialism and postmodern philosophy is that existentialists try to transcend the absurd whereas postmodernists cheerfully embrace it.) "The blow that hurled the modern world on its course of self-destruction [a phrase for decadence] was the Great War of 1914–18." World War I receives more attention than World War II (Barzun is persuasively graphic in describing its horrors

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and absurdities), because he sees it as containing the seeds of everything that followed. Still, Nazism, World War II, and the Soviet Revolution should have been given more space. In the last chapter, "Demotic Life and Times," he provides in the past tense a catalogue of what ails us as if he were a chronicler in some future time (year 2300). The prologue to the future, which ends the book, foresees a "renascent culture," based on a renewed interest in and a creative misappropriation of the past that the book has surveyed. This renascent culture "has resurrected enthusiasms in the young and talented, who keep exclaiming what a joy it is to be alive," echoing Wordsworth's early rapture in the wake of the French Revolution. For Barzun decadence is not an occasion for despair, but rather a kind of clearing of the cultural space in which revival will take place.

Questions remain: Is Barzun, the historian, justified in characterizing our time as decadent? And specifically, what are some of the features of that decadence? Separatism, for one, by which he means the undermining of what he considers "the greatest political creation of the West, the nation-state." The examples are extensive: Ireland, Scotland, Wales, the Basques, Chechnya, Kosovo, Bosnia, and so on. Modern violence on a grand scale is the result not of nationalism, but of its undoing. (Or is it the result of the undoing of empire?) Barzun is describing what may be true of the second, not the first half of the twentieth century. (And what about globalization? Is it an alternative to both nationalism and separatism?) Barzun goes on to indict the excesses of the welfare state (its encouragement of an ethos of victimization and dependency), though not the welfare state itself, which "in a culture based as it was on a machine was inescapable," the corruption of representative government by money and the sound "byte" of television in which character is attacked and issues bypassed, the demotic "lifestyle" (a word that the linguistically fastidious Barzun encloses in quotation marks) in which standards, conventions, and good taste are flouted, and the loss of self-confidence, indeed the loss of selfhood often characterized as an identity crisis. (Compared to the horrors of two world wars, the Holocaust, and other genocides, these instances of decadence are pale indeed. They seem less defining of our terrible century.)

A reader may agree with some or all of Barzun's instances of the second half of our century, but then ask whether there are no countervailing examples of positive achievement in the arts, sciences, politics, and the moral life, which would make decadence a theme rather than the definition of our time. He acknowledges the extraordinary achievements of the sciences, though he believes that in the second half of our

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

century they are the applications, as it were, of earlier monumental conceptual achievements. Moreover, he is mistrustful of the role of scientism in our culture: the attempt to impose the scientific method on all the disciplines. Barzun mentions Martin Luther King, Jr. as a positive figure of emancipation; he could have added Nelson Mandela. The increasing awareness of and sensitivity to worldwide suffering and oppression (an effect of the omnipresence of the media) and the corresponding efforts to address them are, when not an encouragement to see oppression and victimization everywhere, positive achievements.

The last chapter is a jeremiad rather than a piece of historical writing. No two jeremiads are alike; nor do we have to be in complete agreement with one to learn from and be moved by it. What needs to be said, however, is that in the final chapter Barzun has to an extent suspended the double view that he has displayed throughout most of the book, in which he generously provided reasons for opposing militancies in favor of what might be called prophetic irony. We are not given reasons for the modern militancies that he deplores. Yet this is not to say that his jeremiad does not have a resonance that should be taken seriously.

Limitations of space prevent me from doing justice to the book's many local pleasures, particularly its cornucopia of vivid and witty portraits of artists, composers, and painters and their work, the celebrated, the notorious, and those deserving of more notice than they have received (Rousseau, Beaumarchais, Berlioz, William James, Sydney Smith, founder and editor of the *Edinburgh Review*, and many many others). The argumentative effect of those portraits is to support the view that men and women, not impersonal forces, make history. Finally, not to be left unmentioned are the periodic digressions on words in which we are surprised to discover the origins of certain key words ("democracy," "relativism," "man," "romanticism," "pragmatism," etc.) and their uses and misuses. The art critic John Russell's comment is apt: "This book is what used to be called a 'liberal' education, and it should bring that phrase back into favor."

Eugene Goodheart

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Secular Midrash

A Critic's Journey: Literary Reflections, 1958–1998. By Geoffrey Hartman. Yale University Press. $35.00.

Many of the essays collected in Hartman's anthology take us back twenty years, when it still seemed daring to assert the right of criticism to be as perplexing as the primary texts of literature. Hartman reprints versions of his well-known manifestos to liberate the critic, such as "Understanding Criticism," from *Criticism in the Wilderness* (1980): "The spectacle of the critic's mind disoriented, bewildered, caught in some 'wild surmise' about the text and struggling to adjust—is not that one of the interests critical writing has for us?" This characteristically benign rhetorical question belongs to Hartman's quite aggressive promotion of "hermeneutic perplexity" to supplant what he still in the 1990s derides as the "speak-easy" quality, the "teetotaling style" of the Anglo-American tradition. Now that the perplexing discourse of Continental hermeneutics has become so easy to speak, at least within literary academe, different kinds of perplexity about Hartman's own writing move to the fore.

The first "hermeneutic perplexity" in *A Critic's Journey* comes from the seductive bonhomie of the book's title, itself strangely at odds with the antibiographical, antinarrative thrust of the criticism Hartman earlier advocated. The title word "Journey," in an anthology of this sort, carries the promise of a travel account, whose chronological itinerary will be narrated by a guiding voice. Many of Hartman's colleagues have produced such narratives: Alvin Kernan, Frank Kermode, Denis Donoghue, Robert Scholes, and William Pritchard come to mind. Hartman, however, is reticent about his prominent role in the professional traumas featured in recent academic memoirs. Though briefly glancing at the past twenty-five years of turbulence in the humanities, Hartman's abbreviated account and joking metaphors tend to demote it all to a tempest in a teapot.

Hartman is equally reticent about his earlier life. The prefatory "Polemical Memoir" only briefly outlines the distinctive itinerary that brought him as a German Jewish child émigré from Nazi Germany to Yale English and Comparative Literature, by way of seven years in England, and then postwar undergraduate study at Queens College in New York. Only a few laconic sentences report his total separation from family between age nine and sixteen. Another succinct paragraph takes him through his postwar reunion with his mother in America, his undergraduate education, and on into what takes on the status of a new

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

beginning in the welcoming circle of postwar émigré scholars at Yale, featuring above all for Hartman, the figure of Eric Auerbach, also a German Jewish émigré. Auerbach's Jewishness (Hartman is quick to add) "did not define his intellectual character in any obvious way. . . . [He] was totally assimilated into German and European culture." A few pages identify three origins of Hartman's "journey" to prominence as a literary critic—prewar Jewish Germany, England, and Yale—but without exploration of the complex and surely troubled relationships of loss and substitution among them.

By discarding chronological sequence in the arrangement of essays, *A Critic's Journey* leaves out personal matters, even within the period of Hartman's mature career. Under the book's first rubric, "Theory," two essays from the 1990s ("Tea and Totality" and "The Philomela Project") are interwoven with two from 1980 ("Understanding Criticism" and "The Voice of the Shuttle"). The anthology offers none of his writing from 1953 to 1964, the phenomenally productive period which included his first book, *The Unmediated Vision* (1953), and the monumental *Wordsworth's Poetry* (1964). Only four of the essays date from the 1970s, so that Hartman's passage from Auerbach's Yale to that of Paul de Man and "Derridadism" (Hartman's coinage) remains obscure. The two essays from *Beyond Formalism* (1970), "Milton's Counterplot," and "False Themes and Gentle Minds," display the sustained and probing interpretations of specific literary texts and issues in literary history that brought Hartman his early reputation as critic and scholar. Most of the nineteen essays, however, are from the 1980s and early '90s, and range over many topics, such as popular film, Shakespeare, Scripture, and identity politics in American higher education.

Had Hartman put his essays into chronological order, his shift from confidently challenging entrenched Anglo-American critical traditions to somewhat more diffidently defending art and humanistic study would be more apparent. For both periods, the book's formal divisions: "Theory," "Cases," and "Speculations" awkwardly substitute quasi-logical for chronological markers; in most of these essays, Hartman brings theory and speculation to bear on every textual "case," while at the same time embedding abstractions in the linguistic particularity of the texts he quotes. Hartman's merging of theory, textual examples, and speculation makes even the term "critic" oddly misleading. For "literary criticism," as Hartman encountered it in the Yale of the 1950s, is what early led him to promote the substitute terms "commentary" and "hermeneutics"—until "criticism" could be liberated from its Anglo-American fetters.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A Critic's Journey demonstrates Hartman's long search to reorient literary interpretation toward "commentary" and "hermeneutics," terms that for him, if not for de Man and Derrida, took on important religious reference, specifically to the medieval Jewish tradition of Midrash. "The Struggle for the Text" (1986), about the Biblical story of Jacob's struggle with the angel, asserts a general claim for Midrash as a model for secular literary commentary:

> While Midrash must be viewed as a type of discourse with its own rules and historical development, and while we cannot assume that its only function was exegetical, little is more important today than to remind secular literary studies of the richness and subtlety of those strange rabbinical conversations which have been disdained for so long in favor of more objective and systematized modes of reading.

Hartman's Midrash connection both draws him to other postformalist Continental forms of inquiry and, at times, separates him from them: "What is all this talk about Midrash? You're supposed to be a deconstructionist!" he semi-humorously expostulates and answers himself: "Well, there was life before, there is life after Derrida."

Starting in the 1980s, Hartman enlists the Jewish commentary tradition to sanctify deconstructionist terms such as "supplementarity," "intertextuality," "indeterminacy." He warms to the fact that the Jacob story, like other key Biblical portions, is short but commentary is long, indeed unending. The wonderful accumulative quality of Midrash is part of its appeal for Hartman. What he sees as New Critical anxiety about achieving closure disappears in an interpretive method where "strict adherence to proof texts" does not preclude but even requires liberty, autonomy, openness, and continuing hermeneutic revision by learned commentators. In this Midrashic spirit, Hartman in the introduction to his co-edited volume of *Midrash and Literature* (1986) welcomes Reb Derrida and Reb Kermode, along with Reb Milton and Reb Borges into the ancient tradition of "pseudepigrapha."

Whatever the unorthodoxy of Hartman's Midrashic community, the model as applied by him to secular texts does shape interesting and important differences from other literary-critical practices before, during, and since "Reb Derrida." Hartman's interpretations end in dilemmas and further questions, but not in *aporia* (a term popularized by de Man for casting difficulties into impasses). His revisionary readings, moreover, tend to be additive rather than refutational. Hartman eschews de Manian as well as Leavisite or neo-Marxist or postcolonial

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

assault on wrongheaded earlier commentaries. Literary interpretations or judgments drastically contrary to his own are simply omitted. Hartman's Midrashic hermeneutics result in an appealingly generous and noncombative method of commentary. Interpretations and quotations multiply without forcing choices or the expectation of closure; no interpretive victory is at stake.

This reconciliatory tone is important on occasions such as the 1993 celebration in Weimar for the reunification of the Eastern and Western German Shakespeare societies (which split in 1962). Historical and political conflicts more intense than rival literary interpretations threatened this festive occasion, including what Hartman names as the "Banquo's ghost" of Buchenwald nearby. But the rich tradition of Shakespeare commentary helps Hartman to exorcise menacing ghosts. In "Shakespeare and the Ethical Question," translated from his German lecture in Weimar, commentators as various as Goethe, Keats, Trilling, Jan Kott, Hazlitt, Augustine, Harold Bloom, Voltaire, Coleridge, and even Matthew Arnold (not ordinarily included in Hartman's Midrash) all coexist more or less at peace as he revisits the age-old question of whether or not there exists an identifiable ethical position in Shakespeare's drama. Many paragraphs end in questions, including one near the end which begins: "In conclusion. . . ." As the introduction to *Midrash and Literature* remarks: "In this spacious scene of writing, the interpreter's associative knowledge is invested with remarkably broad powers, including even the hermeneutical privilege of allowing questions to stand as part of answers."

In other essays, Hartman's associative knowledge often leads to farfetched allusion and quotation. For instance, in a 1987 essay, "Wordsworth's Touching Compulsion," he interprets the recurrence in Wordsworth's poetry of "bare markers," like a single tree or field, as "part of an earth-writing, an undecyphered geography or geometry." He then moves on to Homer, or rather to Mircea Eliade: "One may call these markers boundary images or omphaloi (navel-points of the cosmos), a term Mircea Eliade adapts from Homer, and they link poetic to geometric absoluteness." The associative train (indebted as much to Freud as to Midrash) picks up *omphaloi* from Eliade and moves punningly on from "Geometry" to "Geomatry," to circle back to a point about Wordsworth that (minus the citations) is really rather familiar—namely that his imagery evokes a "mother-in-nature, . . .the guardian of something invulnerable, which is either the mother-child relation itself or an ideal of psychic development." As the essay proceeds, the status of the point in Wordsworth criticism really doesn't matter, because Hartman's point

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

turns out not to be mainly about Wordsworth the individual poet, but more generally about varieties of "compensatory substitutions" in art.

The model of Midrash helps to explain how for Hartman, citations and the associative trains they fuel often themselves become the point. In the religious tradition, as James Kugel explains in his contribution to *Midrash and Literature*, associative ingenuity pays tribute to the sacred corpus which even remote particularities inhabit, like villages within an empire. In Hartman's secular Midrash, all of European literature from Homer to Geoffrey Hill has become a kind of empire made up of dispersed villages interconnected by means of the commentator's erudition and ingenuity.

Only in the most recent of these essays, a somewhat enigmatic meditation on Walter Benjamin, does Hartman specify difficulties to this secular adaptation of religious models:

> The darshan or preacher had his home plate; he knew the verse with which each portion of Scripture recited on a specific Shabbat began; and the aim of his sermon was to choose a verse as far away from home as possible, so that only he knew how he would get back. My problem is that I have no home base, that a diasporic and disseminative fling is all I can offer.

The projected companion volume, which Hartman refers to at the outset as "essays about subjects of Jewish interest," may offer a different perspective. Already in *The Longest Shadow: In the Aftermath of the Holocaust* (1996), Hartman—the co-founder and project director of the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale—speaks more directly and intimately about "the contradictory imperatives of remembering and forgetting" so powerful to his generation of Jewish survivors. Although these meditative essays involve many of the theoretical questions about indeterminacy, representation, origins, and voice that join Hartman with his deconstructionist colleagues—the shadow of the Holocaust also radically separates him. The deconstructionist play of speculation about what, if any, reality can be located antecedent to "textuality" turns somber in the face of so-called "negationists" who deny the reality of the Holocaust. Hartman is still the commentator, as in the Midrashic tradition, but with a difference that he defines through the words of Claude Lanzmann, the filmmaker of *Shoah*: "My experience in recording the testimonies is similar to that of Lanzmann, while making his film. 'There was an absolute break between the bookish knowledge I had acquired and what these people told me. I understood nothing.'"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The opening essay in *The Longest Shadow* presents the autobiographical narrative withheld from *A Critic's Journey*. In an understated, yet directly expressive voice, Hartman describes his evacuation to England in 1939 in a *Kindertransport*. In this narrative, the critic's journey begins in the child's radical dislocation, as he recalls himself a "quasi-orphan" in a refugee boys' home in England, voraciously filling his emptinesses with every kind of knowledge, from botany texts and foreign languages, to anything in the encyclopedia. More surprising, perhaps, he also presents himself as a child who finds some strangely sheltering presence in the unremarkable landscape of his temporary English home. "Geomater"? Hartman himself makes the connection between his childhood obstinate questionings ("Who or what kept me alive?") and his later attraction to Wordsworth as his first soulmate among English poets.

Whereas Hartman's transfer of Midrash to secular poetics embraces the entire pantheon of European literature and criticism, the community of artists and commentators in *The Longest Shadow* is stripped down to a much smaller, more intimate congregation: in addition to Lanzmann, the recurrent names are Primo Levi, Paul Celan, Aharon Appelfeld, Saul Friedländer, Maurice Blanchot, and Walter Benjamin. These writers, who suffered much more grievously than Hartman during the Nazi period, attest to the loss of language, identity, and even of an ordinary sense of reality, which they struggle to communicate and, in some way, to overcome through their writing. Hartman, by contrast, seems oddly liberated into simplicity and directness by the extremity and urgency of the interviews with Holocaust survivors, most of whom are not writers or artists. The intimacy and burden of transmission that Hartman describes as his interviewing experience simplifies and personalizes his style, parallel to the voices of the interviewees: "Traumatic incidents are described, often in unforgettable fashion; their remembering is recall and reflection rather than compulsive flashback. Though speech may stumble, get ahead of itself, lose its way, it is *voice* as well as *memory* that is recovered from moments of silence and powerlessness."

The Longest Shadow gives a foretaste of the tantalizing dialogue that Hartman's projected volume on Jewish subjects will form with *A Critic's Journey*. Hartman simultaneously participated in two overlapping but also divergent communities, to neither of which he entirely belongs. In both, human need for language, vision, art, and knowledge is affirmed in the face of loss, doubt, and isolation from traditional communities or faiths. In both, fascination with the complex relation of words to wounds generates sustained reflection and speculation about textual

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

breakages, and stories behind stories. But in one of these communities—call it Yale Comparative Literature—Eric Auerbach is the patriarch for Hartman and Paul de Man is a confrere. This émigré group preserves a certain *hauteur* from "speak-easy" Anglo-America, and a rueful regret about the loss of Europe, as in the story Hartman recalls Auerbach telling about a German violinist forced to relocate to America: "Alas, his violin no longer emitted the same 'tone' in the new country." The other of these communities—call it the Fortunoff Video Archive—is conspicuously fatherless; de Man (with his own disturbing imperatives of forgetting) recedes from view, and Hartman tells his own quite different violin story. It is recounted in the present tense of a haunting, recurrent dream:

> My passage to England was uneventful. But during the long train-ride. . .the boys with whom I traveled. . .become restless; they fool about with the one family object I was able to take along, a violin. We all play on it, or rather with it; a string breaks. Later, in Waddesdon, we play some more with it; another string breaks. Eventually, the case cracks, we can see a label inside. On it there is a signature. It identifies the unrepairable instrument as a Stradivarius.

This violin signifies double loss: a wooden object to substitute for a family; boyish playfulness to use on a delicate, noble instrument. Hartman's laconic telling both expresses and belittles the pathos. He and the other boys play *with* rather than *on* the Stradivarius without conscious trauma or regret. In the context of a book about testimonies of traumatic loss, the broken violin joins other images of irreparable breakage and deficit, the loss not only of the high culture signified by the Stradivarius, but of more internal and intimate powers of feeling, as when Hartman later remarks, in connection to his first trip to Israel in 1952: "An organic relation to place is what I lacked and would never recover," and "I rarely experience strong feelings of attachment, whether to people or to soil." The *Kindertransport* carried Hartman to the safety of England, but marked him also as belonging to a traumatized generation dislocated and marred by the violence of history. Both violin stories, and the unsettled relationship between them, belong to Hartman's journey as a critic. Even within the single volume of *A Critic's Journey*, we hear some of both: strains of a foreign-sounding inherited European culture that includes the Jewish intellectual tradition, but also more discordant sounds of disruption, breakage, and loss.

Margery Sabin

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Surplus Intelligence?

THE PASSIONATE MIND: SOURCES OF DESTRUCTION AND CREATIVITY. By Robin Fox. Foreword by Ashley Montagu. Transaction Publishers. $24.95.

IF DARWIN HAD DECIDED to follow up *The Descent of Man* with a volume of Petrarchan sonnets describing sexual selection, or if Sir James George Frazer had paused between volumes twelve and thirteen of *The Golden Bough* to deliver some free-verse effusions on the incest taboo, we would have a tradition against which to consider this volume. Darwin and Frazer, if they felt such impulses, wisely desisted. Robin Fox (born in 1934) has not.

An anthropologist best known for tough-minded books on the biological substrata of human society, Fox has written poems and dialogues throughout his professional career. *The Passionate Mind* revises and expands his earlier volume, *The Violent Imagination* (1989), adding, among other things, his juvenilia and a handful of poems in French. Many of the individual pieces—"The Fool Sings of His Skull and Its Content," "He Apologizes to Her for Comparing Her Eyes to the Wings of Captive Hummingbirds Used in Navaho Rituals"—display the author's anthropological learning, but the pieces also gather to a larger evolutionary theme, the idea of "surplus" intelligence. In "Evolutionary Poetics," Fox writes:

> (Continuing the theme of consciousness
> out of context but reflecting on
> its wobbly route to this plateau herewith
> reflections on the crucial stages of
> hominid history Thus each stage produced
> a curious "surplus" which somehow became
> the basis accidentally for the next

Poetry of this order would not ordinarily merit a review, and I see no reason to be uncharitable to a distinguished scholar who has, perhaps unfortunately, chosen to indulge his avocation in public. Here and there in *The Passionate Mind*, Fox hits an apt metaphor. Mostly, though, he misses. In "Three Possibilities," for example, he writes: "There are those women who inspire lust / For some small reason like the way a dress / Clings to a limb the mouth pulsates the eye / Droops slightly." Compare

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

this to Robert Herrick's "Delight in Disorder"—"A sweet disorder in the dress / Kindles in clothes a wantonness." Herrick takes in the lady's sexiness in a wink, while Fox ponders the idea and, one suspects, the lady walks away.

Fox's volume, however, attests to something of broader cultural importance: the rising prominence of literary self-expression among anthropologists, a phenomenon that at once registers the increasing epistemological muddle of the social sciences *and* the decline of aesthetic standards in the culture at large.

Perhaps the benchmark event of this trend was the publication in 1994 of a poem by Jerome Rothenberg titled "Je Est un Autre: Ethnopoetics and the Poet as Other" in the *American Anthropologist*, the journal of record for anthropology in the United States. That issue of the journal marked the first under the editorship of husband and wife Dennis and Barbara Tedlock, who declared their intention to open "its pages to many new voices and new approaches to the study of humankind," to publish work that "broadens the very forms of anthropological discourse," and to cross "the boundaries of standard genres of writing."

In the event, the Rothenberg poem was a Ginsberg-esque splat with lines such as: "Before there was ethnopoetics there was the world. / I mean to say that we emerged from the second *world* war & knew it was bigger / than that. The world, I mean." And:

> If the mind shapes, configures the world it knows or holds, is there an
> imperial/colonializing mind at work here, or is this mind sharper &
> colleager still
> pursuing its old work: to make an image of the world from what
> appears to it?

Although the Tedlocks had their defenders, many anthropologists were not amused. The Tedlocks held their fire for about a year and then brought out another issue with two somewhat more component poems by University of Chicago anthropologist Paul Friedrich, and a "found poem" by University of Pennsylvania linguist Dell Hymes. Friedrich gives the measure of what anthropo-poets are up to:

> Or my own recall of the languages
> of Mexican cities in the frosted dust around the quadratic plazas
> you cross at dawn for some gruel of fresh field maize and anise
> dished out by great-breasted matrons who whisper in Náhuatl

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

or Taráscan with their silver tongues
caressing, flickering like Hindu sunsets over a temple pool
the carved knee-crooking gods and goddesses in their thousand
cubicles
near the station in Madurai—

The reader who is not exceptionally well-traveled has to be prepared to take a lot on trust about Mexican gruel-vendors and Hindu temples, which, contrary to Friedrich, don't really illuminate each other. But Friedrich, like many other anthropo-poets, is at pains to demonstrate his ease with a kaleidoscopic variety of detail from other cultures. The English romantics, of course, often evoked faraway places, usually in wonder at what mighty Cortez saw or what Kubla Khan decreed. Anthropo-poets, by contrast, evoke the exotic mainly to display their familiarity with it.

In a talk that Rothenberg gave at the Modern Language Association in 1994, he claims to have invented the word *ethnopoetics* around 1969, a year after publishing his first volume of ethnopoetry, *Technicians of the Sacred*. In 1985, Dennis Tedlock published his well-received translation of the Mayan classic *Popol Vuh*. That same year, the Smithsonian Institution Press brought out New Zealand anthropologist Michael Jackson's *Barawa and the Ways Birds Fly in the Sky: An Ethnographic Novel*. Jackson, who had already published more orthodox ethnography on the West African Kuranko, now presented his observations in a fictional story involving a New Zealand anthropologist named "Michael Jackson."

Although it is easy to find precedents of anthropologists now and then writing verse or novels, Jackson's novel and Tedlock's poetry translations heralded a significant shift. A genre of creative writing was emerging which explicitly draws on the expert ethnographer's luminous understanding of cultural *others*. Fifteen years after the Tedlocks injected Rothenberg's ethnopoetics into the *American Anthropologist*, anthropo-poets (and novelists) are now everywhere. A fair number of anthropologists seem to have decided that ordinary nonfiction exposition is inadequate to convey what they have discovered about the human condition, and that imaginative literature is the way to go. But why?

Anthropo-poetry is largely the outgrowth of a shift in the field toward emphasizing the "lived experience" of individuals in other cultures, in contrast to the sorts of things that can be counted or measured, and in contrast to more abstract aspects of social life. The anthropo-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

poets trace their intellectual genealogy to phenomenology and to the free-form interpretive anthropology of Clifford Geertz. In principle, they aim to make available to their readers some moment of genuine contact with people who hold radically different cultural assumptions. That contact, however, has to be mediated by someone, so much of what the anthropo-poets write about is themselves. The anthropo-poet movement ostensibly puts us in the worlds of strangers—Mayans, Aztecs, Kuranko—but in fact plants us in the consciousness of very self-centered anthropologists. The real progenitor of this movement may well be Carlos Castenada, whose fake narratives (once taken as nonfiction) of his psychedelic encounters with the shaman Don Juan were a counterculture favorite in the sixties.

So far, none of the anthropo-poets or novelists have broken through to the level of first-rate literature. If one wishes to get one's anthropology through fiction, Herman Melville's *Typee* is probably still the place to begin. But the acceptance of the anthropological expressivists within the field of anthropology and beyond is an excellent gauge of changes in the human sciences. Their work may be charmlessly didactic and filled with confessional banality, but it is *celebrated* in multicultural studies programs on campuses across the country. To many readers, the anthropo-poets show us our liberation from stultifying Western ways of seeing things, and they promise a magical entry into unknown worlds.

Unfortunately, that view is mistaken. These poems and novels are no shortcut to transcending cultural boundaries. What the anthropo-poets provide is typically little more than a tour of their own psyches, dressed in native costume. Instead of Keats's "magic casements, opening on the foam / of perilous seas," we encounter the brick wall of impenetrable local detail and exotic imagery, giving us just another coded version of the self-conceits and discontents of the alienated Western intellectual.

In that regard, Professor Fox deserves some credit. He is more straightforwardly didactic than the anthropo-poets and, though his poems are plenty self-indulgent, they are not the typical anthropo-poetic exercises of attempting to describe the world by staring into a mirror. Unfortunately, the anthropo-poets have opened the way for anthropologists of all stripes to publish their amateur verse. And much of that is material, like Fox's, that has been better said in traditional nonfiction forms of prose.

Peter W. Wood

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Fundamentalism

ENEMY IN THE MIRROR: ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM AND THE LIMITS OF MODERN RATIONALISM. **Roxanne L. Euben.** Princeton University Press. $49.50.

JIHAD. EXPANSION ET DÉCLIN DE L'ISLAMISME. **Gilles Kepel.** Gallimard. $20.00.

LEGACY OF THE PROPHET: DESPOTS, DEMOCRATS AND THE NEW POLITICS OF ISLAM. **Anthony Shadid.** Westview Press. $26.00.

HUNDREDS OF BOOKS and articles have been published over the last two decades upbraiding the West for profoundly misunderstanding the revival of political Islam and of fundamentalism, to use the common but not very precise term. They all accuse it of failing to appreciate the intrinsic value of Islamic ideas, its deeply democratic and peaceful essence, and of describing it as an irrational reaction to modernity and a major threat to Western civilization.

The intensity and the number of these apologias are a little surprising, for there have been relatively few critiques of political Islam and these have been, on the whole, in measured terms as befitting the rules of academic discourse in the West. For truly fierce attacks one has to turn to India or Nigeria, where cruder customs prevail and where the habit of calling a spade an agricultural implement is not yet widespread. But the Western apologists prefer not to deal with Bal Thackeray of Mumbai, the fire breathing Hindu extremist, they prefer to focus on students of Islam in Europe and America. Let us put aside for a moment the question of whether their basic assumption is correct, namely whether there is a true misunderstanding—or whether perhaps (as in the Israeli-Arab confrontation) the problem arises from the fact that the two sides understand each other only too well. Be that as it may, this industry flourishes more in the United States and Germany than in Britain and France, and, after all these huge volumes published about fundamentalism (Islamic as well as Christian and Jewish) all over the globe, the question then arises whether much new remains to be said. Professor Euben, a student of political philosophy who reads Arabic, devotes most of her book to one specific Islamic thinker, Sayyid Qutb. An Egyptian secular writer, he became a leading guru of Islamic radicalism following a long visit to the United States in the 1940s; the confrontation with American decadence and moral decay he witnessed there had

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a lasting impact on him and generated a series of influential books which became the inspiration of radical Muslims practicing violence from the Philippines to Africa. The novelty in Qutb was not so much his anti-Westernism, antimodernism, or reinterpretation of Islam, which can be found in other Islamic thinkers, but his argument that most if not all existing Muslim regimes were also corrupt and sinful (the term used is *yahiliya* which can be translated as pagan, or, perhaps more correctly barbaric—the state of affairs prevailing before Mohammed appeared) and had to be combated and overthrown. This innovation brought him into conflict with the leadership of his own country; he was kept in prison for years under Nasser and was eventually hanged in 1966.

In view of the influence his writings had posthumously—among his disciples were the murderers of Anwar Sadat—the preoccupation with Qutb is of course perfectly legitimate. But Professor Euben combines it with a critique of the legacy of the Enlightenment and modern rationalism; she considers Marx a fellow critic in this campaign, which may come as a surprise to most Marxists. This is a learned book, the envoi is from Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* and there are frequent references to Foucault, Hannah Arendt, Heidegger, Adorno, Bourdieu, and even Hans-Georg Gadamer. But are these thinkers really of much help to explain Sayyid Qutb who belongs to another tradition? About as much, I suspect, as to explain the Lubavicher Rebbe or Pat Robertson.

Viewed in retrospect, attacks against the heritage of the Enlightenment and rationalism, assaults on Western civilization and humanism were quite fashionable during the latter part of the nineteenth century. This is a study in comparative political theory and Professor Euben could have done worse than pointing to some of the predecessors. She would have found *The War Against the West*, a book by Aurel Kolnai, an Austro-Hungarian psychoanalyst published in 1938 (unfortunately out of print for a long time) very useful. It's a compilation and critique of anti-Enlightenment writings of the twenties and thirties which in many ways anticipates the arguments of the fundamentalists on martyrdom and moral purity, on social justice, and about any other subject close to the heart of contemporary fundamentalists.

But there is an even more striking parallel, not with German National Socialism, suspicious of and averse to religion, but the Romanian fascists of the Archangel Michael variety, combining deep religiosity with the unity of the nation, submission to God, hate of the foreigners (infidels), anti-liberalism, anti-rationalism, and a firm belief in political violence. Professor Euben, to be sure, is not uncritical of the "progressive" claims of Muslim fundamentalism. She does know that while the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Islamists, or at least the more educated among them, use the Western terminology of democracy and human rights but that they also believe that the holy Quran is not open to discussion on the part of the faithful. And if the Quran says, for instance, that sovereignty lays not with the people but with God, or that women are inferior to men, this cannot be explained away or reinterpreted. The only way out of the dilemma is to claim that the Quran does not really mean what it says, and this argument is hardly acceptable to a pious Muslim.

Sayyid Qutb also figures prominently in two other recent works on Muslim fundamentalism. A page from Qutb's *Signposts*, his last and most influential book, appears on the cover of Gilles Kepel's *Jihad*. Kepel works at the Paris CRNS; he has followed radical Islam for many years and has written about Qutb and Muslim extremism in Egypt earlier on. Together with his colleague Olivier Roy he belongs to the leading students of this phenomenon. But Kepel (like Roy) is less impressed than Euben by Qutb's political ideas—there are references to the poverty of the Islamic radicals' ideas. As he sees it the expansion of Islamism occurred because of the breakdown of traditional Islamic regimes on one hand, and the weakness of radical ideologies such as revolutionary socialism on the other. As a result many Muslim intellectuals rediscovered Islam hence the calls for Holy War (*Jihad*) or at least the establishment of true Islamic states.

But as Kepel sees it, this movement has not been a great success either, and this seems to be true both for the conservative and the radical wing of the Islamic fundamentalists. The conservatives, Saudi Arabia and the Muslim religious establishments in Egypt and elsewhere are discredited, whereas the record of radical regimes such as Iran, Sudan, and the Taliban in Afghanistan have been dismal and prospects are less than brilliant. Extreme nationalist regimes such as Iraq, Syria, and Libya have kept their distance from Islamism or even combated it. The Islamists have made some progress among the Palestinians but the terrorists in Algeria are on the defensive and a phenomenon such as Osama bin Ladin, the Saudi planner and paymaster of the terrorists, while providing headlines for the Western media, will forever remain marginal.

Kepel may well be right in the long run. Having underrated the importance of political Islam for many years, some Western observers have belatedly accepted its important role and are again lagging behind events; they now attribute to Islamism an exaggerated importance even while it is in decline. The important differences between conditions in various countries are overlooked, and so are the rifts within the Muslim Brotherhood and kindred groups. Qutb's teachings have by no means

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

been embraced by the mainstream groups inside the Brotherhood, and his authority as a religious exegetist is low. But there are social trends pointing in the opposite direction. Islamism is, broadly speaking, a movement of the urban and rural poor and of the lower middle class. These segments of the population in the Islamic world are suffering not only spiritually but materially as a result of economic stagnation; and there is a considerable amount of social dynamite. The fact that Islamism in power in countries such as Iran or Sudan had disastrous consequences will not necessarily influence the masses in a country such as Egypt preoccupied with the situation at home rather than in other countries. The recent elections in Egypt have pointed to the undiminished influence of the Muslim Brotherhood. And the rulers in Tehran and Khartoum, even if unable to improve conditions, at least preach equality and curb ostentatious spending. In brief, the decline of Islamism correctly analyzed by Kepel and others, while inevitable in the longer run, will probably take longer than they think to unfold.

Anthony Shadid, a U.S. citizen of Lebanese origin was for years Cairo correspondent of AP. He is no political philosopher, but knows Arabic, has visited many Muslim countries and interviewed their leaders over the years. He loves Cairo, but as a Christian does not entirely feel at home there. He is critical of U.S. policy in Egypt, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, and of course, Israel. He believes that the West must encourage democracy in countries such as Egypt with the realization that it is in fact encouraging Islamism and that governments will be elected that have no love for America. This perspective would be more plausible if Shadid could point to forces of reform in the Middle East to whom the future seems to belong. He does mention the Khatami phenomenon in Iran, the more moderate religious leader who became prime minister replacing the fanatics of the early years of the Khomeini revolution. He also mentions the Egyptian Center party, Hezbollah in Lebanon which engages both in guerrilla war and political and social activities, and leaders such as Kamal El-Said Habib, an erstwhile leader of the Jihad terrorist group (which assassinated Sadat) but later opted for political action.

But these are not very strong hopes. The weakness of Khatami vis à vis the conservatives in Iran has been shown time and again and it is more than doubtful that the Center party would benefit from a political earthquake in Egypt. In any case, all these reform candidates believe that their societies should be run according to the Sharia, the religious law, which is incompatible with democracy. The problem with these forces is not that they have no love for America and the West; America, in all probability, could live with this. The real difficulty is that their

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

love for freedom and democracy is also dubious. As the author puts it: "Few in the West would agree with their goals. Some seem intolerant, others overly traditional, even regressive." If so, why support them in the first place? Because in Mr. Shadid's view the alternative, meaning the status quo, is even worse.

It is difficult to muster enthusiasm for the present regime in Egypt (let alone Saudi Arabia). But can Mr. Shadid, can anyone, claim with any degree of conviction that the political alternatives in these countries will be less repressive, less corrupt? It may or may not be more effective but it will certainly not be more democratic in any meaningful sense. This is a depressing outlook but it may well be the only realistic one, all the promises to the contrary as merely what is known in colloquial Arabic as *kalam fadi*—empty talk. There must be forces of democratic reform in the Middle East, and for all one knows they will prevail one day. But this day seems not to be near.

Walter Laqueur

Dawn Powell as Correspondent

Selected Letters of Dawn Powell, 1913–1965. By Tim Page. Henry Holt & Company. $30.00.

Any editor worth his salt should have a feel for what his audience wants—or what his audience ought to want. It was the tragedy of Dawn Powell's life that her editors didn't. In Tim Page's view, and mine (as a friend of Powell's from 1951 on), she was poorly served by her publishers, whose insensitive editors, including the legendary Max Perkins, and lumpen marketing personnel appear not to have had a clue how to get a handle on the acidic essence of her novels or how to promote them to the appropriate audience.

Nor did her agents. Consider this sad note to Carl Brandt, head of Brandt & Brandt:

> *Dear Carl:*
> *Can we get a Hollywood divorce and still be frightfully, frightfully good friends? I mean, hold hands in nightclubs and gaze deep into each other's pocketbooks for the photographers?*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> *Anyway, a lot of miscellaneous things have been bobbing up (including a low state of mind) and it seems a change would be very salutary. New hands, new eyes, new faces, new pocketbooks, new photographers. So, with quivering lip but chin up, I would like to pack up my pretties from all departments, including the best pieces of furniture from your offices (you must admit they were Mother's) and leave your bed and board.*

It was dispiriting for Powell to see her fifteen novels appear to mixed, although often favorable, reviews, sell poorly, and quietly go out of print. From the *Diaries*:

> *September 18, 1940. In spite of pleasure over Max Perkins' editorial work on me, now that the book is to come out the usual deadly hopelessness and weariness comes in. The lack of any ad or announcement, the silence from publishing end, the all-too-familiar signals of another blank shot, and once again the weary packing up and readying another book—never understanding why I am unable to follow the arrogance of my writing with an arrogance of personality or why the luck should so unfailingly fall elsewhere.*

Powell was born in 1896 in Mount Gilead, Ohio, the second of three daughters. Her mother died when she was seven, and the girls were raised by various relatives until her father remarried in 1907. After her disturbed and abusive stepmother burned some of her first stories, Powell ran away at fourteen and lived with an aunt until she matriculated at Lake Erie College (class of 1918) in Painesville, Ohio. As outstanding a student in college as she had been in high school, she moved to New York City, where she married Joseph Goushay, a poet and advertising executive, in 1920. She gave birth to a severely mentally impaired son, Jojo, in 1921 and began writing novels. Lack of money and Jojo's violence and permanent hospitalization plagued the marriage, which nevertheless, and despite Goushay's advancing alcoholism, lasted until his death in 1962.

Powell hit bottom in 1958 when Goushay's summary retirement with no pension left her the sole support of the family. She increasingly sought freelance magazine work and hack reviewing while struggling in real poverty with her fiction and unsuccessful forays into television and play adaptations.

On the publication of what would be her last novel, *The Golden Spur*, Edmund Wilson, an early admirer and close friend, wrote a strongly appreciative critical appraisal of her work for *The New Yorker* (Novem-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ber 17, 1962) that Page calls "far and away the most sustained and serious critical appreciation to appear during her lifetime." But it was too late. Powell's genre was passé, and her health was steadily deteriorating.

Reviewing *The Locusts Have No King* in *The New York Times* in 1948, Alice S. Morris placed Powell in proper perspective:

> If the art of satire at Miss Powell's hand is less baleful, knife-edged and glittering than when Mr. Evelyn Waugh puts his hand to it, it is equally relevant and more humane. In *The Locusts Have No King*, Miss Powell pins down her locusts—some New York barflies, bigwigs and gadabouts—with drastic precision, but never without pity. . . .The combination of a waspish sense of satire with a human sense of pathos results in a novel that is highly entertaining and curiously touching.

But lady novelists in this country were writing romances, not sophisticated social satire. Furthermore, Powell lacked the elegant appeal of F. Scott Fitzgerald (also born in 1896). Indeed, Powell herself thought her name sounded like "an unsuccessful stripper." She was, in fact, a fabulously successful stripper—if we're talking about removing veneer from the poseurs, *flâneurs*, and assorted dumbbell lettrists who were fodder for her novels.

In a letter to Wilson, Powell wrote disdainfully of those who wrote to posterity (Fitzgerald) and those who wrote to friends (Hemingway). But if neither Powell nor her handlers knew how to reach an audience for her books, Powell sure knew the audience for conversation and letters.

Her countless friends and admirers would attest that she was the wittiest talker they'd ever met. The barbs, send-ups, neologisms, and *aperçus* in conversations that took place almost every sundown poured out once the same had been done to a few drinks, accompanied by her irrepressible laughter. Dawn Powell was sharper than a serpent's tooth and funnier than Dorothy Parker. Parker was fragmented in mood and temperament and credited with much that was not hers—Dawn was consistent.

Nothing can recapture the repartee—and there was no *l'esprit de l'escalier* or *treppenwitz* with Powell—it popped like firecrackers on the Fourth. And she studded her correspondence with the kind of conversational asides that read the way people talk, if they happen to have Powell's swift gift.

The first installment of the rediscovery and revival of Dawn Powell, and the welcome fact that almost all her novels are now available, began with Gore Vidal's celebrated and celebratory article in the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

November 5, 1987, *New York Review of Books*. Page, the music critic of the *Washington Post*, ran across Edmund Wilson's essay on Powell in 1991. The second installment began with Page's decade of devotion resulting in *The Diaries of Dawn Powell* in 1995, the widely acclaimed *Dawn Powell: A Biography* in 1998, and now the selected letters.

Tim Page, the most devoted Powellian of us all, appears to have issued himself an unlimited research warrant, for in editing the letters and diaries and writing the only biography, he has talked to every available survivor and read notebooks and letters by the thousand.

Since Powell knew virtually everybody in literary, theatrical, and nightclub-showbiz circles (few getting off unscathed), the names droppeth as the gentle rain from hell.

Page's selections run from her closest friends—Wilson, Vidal, Hemingway, Dos Passos, Perkins, and Gerald and Sara Murphy—to such compatriots as Dorothy Parker, James Thurber, S. J. Perelman, Ken Tynan, Lillian Hellmann, e.e. cummings, Jean Stafford, Mary McCarthy, Elizabeth Hardwick, Philip Rahv, Dwight Macdonald, Nöel Coward, J. B. Priestley, and, from her trip to Paris, Samuel Beckett, Simone de Beauvoir, and Jean Paul Sartre ("the Hopalong Cassidy of France. . .a commercial enterprise like cornflakes or Shirley Temple").

In her letters, as in her talk, Powell knew her audience and geared the tone and content to that perfect audience of one. Seldom self-pitying, but leveling with her intimates on how things really were, her medical and financial reports were always graced with a gallant, if desperate, wit ("I'm going to stick my head in the typewriter").

And as with all good letter writers, the aural quality was ever present. The lucky ones experienced it in both senses of the word. Here are a few examples. To John Hall Wheelock, Perkins's colleague at Scribner's:

> *I recall that when [Max] Perkins asked me what the plot/general idea would be of* A Time to Be Born *and I said, "It's about that man on the ledge of the Gotham about to jump off, only that has nothing to do with it," he nodded as if it were all clear as a bell to him and away we went.*

An explanation to Wheelock on the disappearance of one of the characters in the related novels:

> *Denny, hero of* Turn, Magic Wheel, *met the heroine of* A Time to Be Born *and they both marched off to war, though in* The Locusts Have No King *I believe Denny was drinking much too much. In*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

[The Wicked Pavilion] *it seems he's too drunk to even get into it, what a pity.*

To Wheelock:

Dear Jack:
Since I do not have the money to pay off the remains of my debt to Scribner's and since you remind me so tactfully that it was advanced to bring me back from Paris, I wonder if we couldn't settle the whole thing by your sending me back to Paris.

To the British art historian, Bryan Robertson:

The morning after the directors' meeting here—indeed, the day you left—I was rubbing a light Madeira over my temples when Dos Passos popped in and things began again. I told him your splendid words about him—you did say he was the best-dressed man in Ville Franche, didn't you?—and we stroked each other's brains pretending all the time we weren't really killing a fifth of Mother's Cutty Sark, dividing the cork quite evenly, then going over to Rickey's on all fours and having our dishes on the floor to show we live in a democracy.

To her closest friend, Margaret De Silver:

He confided to Tom that she was terrific in the hay. This always sounds so athletic, as if she did go at it with a pitchfork à la Soviet womanhood.

I can't tell whether this is love or merely showing their exes how happy they are NOW, you bastards. . . .

To the Lake Erie alumnae magazine about her time there:

Three days later, all settled in my room, tennis racket and boudoir cap jauntily decorating the old pine dresser, I took the trouble to leaf through my rosy little roommate's diary. (I wasn't snooping, I merely wanted to check on her prose style.) It was a shock to see this entry: "My roommate's name is Dawn. I think she is fast because she has a boudoir cap and a bottle of wine."

I cannot remember what Miss Brownfield [the new dean] could have said to us [about World War I breaking out], but I still

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

remember the glorious sense of power she gave us. We were free. All roads were open to us. There was nothing we could not do and we would know the right moment when it came.

Such were the peaks from which we sought to soar.

To De Silver:

[I was advised] to get Jojo into another ward as he was much too clever and nice to be there. . . .

I do not know which is worse—to be fastened to someone's coat-tails or to have them fastened to yours. As you have the biggest coattail riders in the world I suppose you know the answer, and as I hate hanging on and hate equally having cargo of my own, I think I will go sit on a steeple and ponder this. Do you want to join me in buying a cooperative steeple?

Expect to be settled or permanently unsettled by Saturday. Probably on the steeple.

To Monroe Stearns, editor, Bobbs Merrill:

The dowdy and soppy aspects of Dickens have been drummed into us for so long that the sheer wit and brilliance of many passages have been neglected. I don't mean the jolly Pickwickish sort of thing but the kind of wit that later became peculiarly Bright Young Englishman wit—the Nöel Coward school. The reason for the durability of these bubbles is that they are actually not superficial or mere smart fizz but are genuine champagne from the very best grapes and the very best-manured soil.

To Stearns:

Frankly I don't think either Joe [who had just died in 1962] or I could have gone on much more. We were both putting on a show for each other of Retirement can be Fun and the costumes and scenery were frayed, the stars gasping their lines. I'm glad he came back for the first reprise, anyway. Booth would have approved.

Jerrold Hickey

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

To the Editor:

Thank you for the essay on social constructionism by Mark Bauerlein [*Partisan Review*, Spring 2001]. What a breath of fresh air!

Barry Wood
Harvard University

To the Editor:

In "Social Constructionism: Philosophy for the Academic Workplace," Mark Bauerlein bemoans the pernicious influence of scholars like Michel Foucault in the academy. I think Bauerlein's fears would be allayed if he would just read one of Foucault's books—if only because they tend to deflate all the silly premises of "constructionism" as articulated by Bauerlein, and which he attributes to Foucault himself.

Bauerlein cites, for instance, a second-hand paraphrase of one of Foucault's assertions about the concept of "sexuality." Foucault's research demonstrates quite clearly that before the nineteenth century sexuality did not have the power to define one's identity; that is, if it were discovered that a man had had sexual encounters with other men, it would not be presumed—as it would later—that we have thereby discovered the essential and eternal "homosexuality" of his being.

I confess I find it impossible to see in this kind of research what Bauerlein sees: a rejection of reality and a strident assertion that "the contents of knowledge are dependent upon the social conditions of the knower." Did we read the same book? Is there anybody who has demonstrated more forcefully than Foucault that "the contents of knowledge" are always managed by an archive and a shared argot, and thus could never be established by an individual "knower"? Foucault's most basic thesis is that the individual is subject to knowledge, not the other way around.

Mr. Bauerlein is certainly not the first to have received and reiterated the idea that historicists and poststructuralists are champions of "relativism" and "subjectivism"—despite the fact that the emptiness of these concepts has been most effectively exposed precisely by these thinkers. Why are there so many observers like Mr. Bauerlein who don't know this? I suspect it's because it is much easier to read *about* these figures than the works themselves; and since the brevity of a second-hand paraphrase tends to be proportionate to its dismissiveness, even the well-meaning writer (under a deadline) can't resist the more hostile strain of received ignorance. The upshot is the accepted fact that but for "a few near-retirement humanists and realist philosopher holdouts,"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nothing goes on in the academy except the repeated mantra that reality isn't real.

Brian Artese
Northwestern University

Mark Bauerlein replies:

Brian Artese spends the bulk of his letter imputing to me a "fear" of Foucault's influence, an ignorance of Foucault's texts, and an attribution of "silly" constructionism to Foucault himself.

Why Artese focuses so much on Foucault I have no idea, for there is only one reference to Foucault in the essay, in a paragraph containing Eve Sedgwick's citation of him. I don't impute anything to Foucault, nor do I disregard his work. (Nor do I *fear* his influence.) Instead, I propose a reason why constructionist ideas have become academic dogma. In discussing constructionist ideas, I say not that they are wrong, but that they are open to question, debatable. In most academic settings, however, that debate is foreclosed, and the ideas are taken as basic professional principles. I chose the Sedgwick quotation because it illustrates how an idea in Foucault has become "axiomatic." An analysis of Foucault's ideas would, of course, require a careful examination of *Discipline and Punish* and a dozen other texts. It might also detail the ways in which Foucault's points have declined into vulgar formulations and caricatures in the mouths of disciples and critics. That would be a different essay.

Artese is clearly a committed Foucauldian, and the servility of such disciples to their masters is often balanced by the bile they hurl at those outside the fold. His certainty that Foucault demonstrates that knowledge is managed by institutions and that individuals are subject to knowledge bespeaks a thoroughgoing investment in Foucault's corpus. Artese might be less certain about these matters if he looked into other arguments, say, discussions of knowledge by Peirce, Wittgenstein, Carnap, Quine, Austin, Chisholm, Searle, Davidson, and Haack.

Mark Bauerlein
Emory University

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NORTHWEST FLORIDA REVIEW

Home of the Richard Eberhart Award

Although we will publish outstanding emerging poets and writers from time to time, our main vision is to give support and exposure to the accomplished poets and writers who have spent years perfecting their craft. We will strive to publish the best poetry and fiction being written today, and the finest translations of international poetry and fiction.

The editors

Mario Petaccia
Editor
Lola Haskins
Poetry Editor
Dana Miller
Fiction Editor
Stanley Barkan
Translation Editor
Sher Fick
Art Editor

Submissions welcome

"The *Northwest Florida Review* seems to have a head start on most new magazines. The vision of its founder, the experience of its capable editors, and the mission it has spelled out for itself all bode well for success."

- Joseph Bruchac
Greenfield Review Press

"I have long admired the work of those associated with the *Northwest Florida Review*; I look forward to their first issue and the work they will showcase."

Rick Campbell
Anhinga Press

Two issues a year. $6.00 an issue. $10.00 dollars a year. $19.00 two years.

THE GAIUS CORPORATION
Okaloosa Island Press
P O Box 8122
Ft. Walton Beach, FL 32548

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

HARVARD REVIEW

"Readable, various, serious, lively!"

~ Seamus Heaney

Subscribe!

1 year (2 issues): $16 domestic, $28 overseas (airmail)

single copies and back issues available

Published twice yearly by

HOUGHTON LIBRARY
of the Harvard College Library

HARVARD REVIEW
Lamont Library, Level 5
Harvard University
Cambridge, MA
02138
phone: (617) 495-9775
fax: (617) 496-3692
harvrev@fas.harvard.edu

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

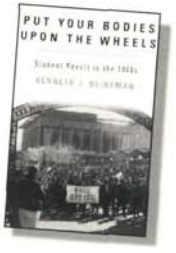
JEREMY BERNSTEIN

The Merely Personal

Sparkling observations on science and scientists by "one of those few who still know how to tell us what scientists do."—MARVIN MINSKY. "In these essays Jeremy Bernstein reminds one of how full of surprise and pleasure the world is."—JOSEPH EPSTEIN.

KENNETH J. HEINEMAN

Put Your Bodies Upon the Wheels



In a powerful narrative, Mr. Heineman explores the root ideas of the 1960s student revolt and shows how campus unrest divided the nation along class and cultural lines. "Brief but impressive...a strong dose of what the era was really like."—*Booklist.*

ANN BLAINEY

Fanny and Adelaide

An engrossing dual biography of the Kemble sisters—Fanny the most famous English-speaking actress of her day, Adelaide among the finest of English-born opera singers—and of their complex and fascinating relationship. "Colorful adventures of two scions of a 19th-century English theatrical family."—Kirkus Reviews.

ROBERT THOMAS FALLON

A Theatergoer's Guide to Shakespeare

These scene-by-scene surveys of the plays are designed for intelligent readers and provide incisive and engaging commentary on character, theme, setting, poetry, and stage history. "Wonderfully reader-friendly."—WILLIAM KERRIGAN, University of Massachusetts at Amherst

ALDOUS HUXLEY

Complete Essays

Volume III, 1930–1935. This third of a projected six volumes displays Huxley's concern with the social and ideological trends of the years between the world wars, and with the role of technocracy and science in an era of political experimentation. Edited with commentary by Robert S. Baker and James Sexton. "A remarkable publishing event...beautifully produced and authoritatively edited."—JEFFREY HART.

Ivan R. Dee, Publisher

Chicago • A Member of the Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group

At your bookseller, or order toll-free 1-800-462-6420 with a major credit card.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BENNINGTON WRITING SEMINARS

MFA in Writing and Literature
Two-Year Low-Residency Program

A. BLAKE GARDNER

FICTION
NONFICTION
POETRY
Scholarships available

For more information contact:
Writing Seminars, Box PR
Bennington College
Bennington, VT 05201
802-440-4452
Fax 802-440-4453
www.bennington.edu

CORE FACULTY

FICTION

Douglas Bauer
Martha Cooley
Elizabeth Cox
Maria Flook
Lynn Freed
Amy Hempel
Alice Mattison
Jill McCorkle
Askold Melnyczuk
Rick Moody

NONFICTION

Sven Birkerts
Susan Cheever
Lucy Grealy
Phillip Lopate
George Packer
Bob Shacochis

POETRY

April Bernard
Thomas Sayers Ellis
Jane Hirshfield
Amy Gerstler
David Lehman
Ed Ochester
Liam Rector
Jason Shinder

WRITERS-IN-RESIDENCE

Robert Bly
Lyndall Gordon
Donald Hall

PAST FACULTY IN RESIDENCE

Agha Shahid Ali
Coleman Barks
Lucie Brock-Broido
Robert Creeley
Stephen Dobyns
Susan Dodd
Mark Doty
William Finnegan
Karen Finley
George Garrett
Vivian Gornick
Barry Hannah
Edward Hoagland
Richard Howard
Marie Howe
Carole Maso
E. Ethelbert Miller
Sue Miller
Howard Norman
Marjorie Perloff
Robert Pinsky
Mary Robison
Roger Shattuck
Ilan Stavans

Partisan Review
Published at Boston University
Printed in the U.S.A.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED